

Chapter XXII - Some Old Scenes, And Some New People

Steerforth and I stayed for more than a fortnight in that part of the country. We were very much together, I need not say; but occasionally we were asunder for some hours at a time. He was a good sailor, and I was but an indifferent one; and when he went out boating with Mr Peggotty, which was a favourite amusement of his, I generally remained ashore. My occupation of Peggotty's spare-room put a constraint upon me, from which he was free: for, knowing how assiduously she attended on Mr Barkis all day, I did not like to remain out late at night; whereas Steerforth, lying at the Inn, had nothing to consult but his own humour. Thus it came about, that I heard of his making little treats for the fishermen at Mr Peggotty's house of call, 'The Willing Mind', after I was in bed, and of his being afloat, wrapped in fishermen's clothes, whole moonlight nights, and coming back when the morning tide was at flood. By this time, however, I knew that his restless nature and bold spirits delighted to find a vent in rough toil and hard weather, as in any other means of excitement that presented itself freshly to him; so none of his proceedings surprised me.

Another cause of our being sometimes apart, was, that I had naturally an interest in going over to Blunderstone, and revisiting the old familiar scenes of my childhood; while Steerforth, after being there once, had naturally no great interest in going there again. Hence, on three or four days that I can at once recall, we went our several ways after an early breakfast, and met again at a late dinner. I had no idea how he employed his time in the interval, beyond a general knowledge that he was very popular in the place, and had twenty means of actively diverting himself where another man might not have found one.

For my own part, my occupation in my solitary pilgrimages was to recall every yard of the old road as I went along it, and to haunt the old spots, of which I never tired. I haunted them, as my memory had often done, and lingered among them as my younger thoughts had lingered when I was far away. The grave beneath the tree, where both my parents lay - on which I had looked out, when it was my father's only, with such curious feelings of compassion, and by which I had stood, so desolate, when it was opened to receive my pretty mother and her baby - the grave which Peggotty's own faithful care had ever since kept neat, and made a garden of, I walked near, by the hour. It lay a little off the churchyard path, in a quiet corner, not so far removed but I could read the names upon the stone as I walked to and fro, startled by the sound of the church-bell when it struck the hour, for it was like a departed voice to me. My reflections at these times were always associated with the figure I was to make in life, and the distinguished things I was to do. My echoing footsteps went to no

other tune, but were as constant to that as if I had come home to build my castles in the air at a living mother's side.

There were great changes in my old home. The ragged nests, so long deserted by the rooks, were gone; and the trees were lopped and topped out of their remembered shapes. The garden had run wild, and half the windows of the house were shut up. It was occupied, but only by a poor lunatic gentleman, and the people who took care of him. He was always sitting at my little window, looking out into the churchyard; and I wondered whether his rambling thoughts ever went upon any of the fancies that used to occupy mine, on the rosy mornings when I peeped out of that same little window in my night-clothes, and saw the sheep quietly feeding in the light of the rising sun.

Our old neighbours, Mr and Mrs Grayper, were gone to South America, and the rain had made its way through the roof of their empty house, and stained the outer walls. Mr Chillip was married again to a tall, raw-boned, high-nosed wife; and they had a weazen little baby, with a heavy head that it couldn't hold up, and two weak staring eyes, with which it seemed to be always wondering why it had ever been born.

It was with a singular jumble of sadness and pleasure that I used to linger about my native place, until the reddening winter sun admonished me that it was time to start on my returning walk. But, when the place was left behind, and especially when Steerforth and I were happily seated over our dinner by a blazing fire, it was delicious to think of having been there. So it was, though in a softened degree, when I went to my neat room at night; and, turning over the leaves of the crocodile-book (which was always there, upon a little table), remembered with a grateful heart how blest I was in having such a friend as Steerforth, such a friend as Peggotty, and such a substitute for what I had lost as my excellent and generous aunt.

MY nearest way to Yarmouth, in coming back from these long walks, was by a ferry. It landed me on the flat between the town and the sea, which I could make straight across, and so save myself a considerable circuit by the high road. Mr Peggotty's house being on that waste-place, and not a hundred yards out of my track, I always looked in as I went by. Steerforth was pretty sure to be there expecting me, and we went on together through the frosty air and gathering fog towards the twinkling lights of the town.

One dark evening, when I was later than usual - for I had, that day, been making my parting visit to Blunderstone, as we were now about to return home - I found him alone in Mr Peggotty's house, sitting thoughtfully before the fire. He was so intent upon his own reflections

that he was quite unconscious of my approach. This, indeed, he might easily have been if he had been less absorbed, for footsteps fell noiselessly on the sandy ground outside; but even my entrance failed to rouse him. I was standing close to him, looking at him; and still, with a heavy brow, he was lost in his meditations.

He gave such a start when I put my hand upon his shoulder, that he made me start too.

'You come upon me,' he said, almost angrily, 'like a reproachful ghost!'

'I was obliged to announce myself, somehow,' I replied. 'Have I called you down from the stars?'

'No,' he answered. 'No.'

'Up from anywhere, then?' said I, taking my seat near him.

'I was looking at the pictures in the fire,' he returned.

'But you are spoiling them for me,' said I, as he stirred it quickly with a piece of burning wood, striking out of it a train of red-hot sparks that went careering up the little chimney, and roaring out into the air.

'You would not have seen them,' he returned. 'I detest this mongrel time, neither day nor night. How late you are! Where have you been?' 'I have been taking leave of my usual walk,' said I.

'And I have been sitting here,' said Steerforth, glancing round the room, 'thinking that all the people we found so glad on the night of our coming down, might - to judge from the present wasted air of the place - be dispersed, or dead, or come to I don't know what harm. David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years!'

'My dear Steerforth, what is the matter?'

'I wish with all my soul I had been better guided!' he exclaimed. 'I wish with all my soul I could guide myself better!'

There was a passionate dejection in his manner that quite amazed me. He was more unlike himself than I could have supposed possible.

'It would be better to be this poor Peggotty, or his lout of a nephew,' he said, getting up and leaning moodily against the chimney-piece, with his face towards the fire, 'than to be myself, twenty times richer and twenty times wiser, and be the torment to myself that I have been, in this Devil's bark of a boat, within the last half-hour!'

I was so confounded by the alteration in him, that at first I could only observe him in silence, as he stood leaning his head upon his hand, and looking gloomily down at the fire. At length I begged him, with all the earnestness I felt, to tell me what had occurred to cross him so unusually, and to let me sympathize with him, if I could not hope to advise him. Before I had well concluded, he began to laugh - fretfully at first, but soon with returning gaiety.

'Tut, it's nothing, Daisy! nothing!' he replied. 'I told you at the inn in London, I am heavy company for myself, sometimes. I have been a nightmare to myself, just now - must have had one, I think. At odd dull times, nursery tales come up into the memory, unrecognized for what they are. I believe I have been confounding myself with the bad boy who 'didn't care', and became food for lions - a grander kind of going to the dogs, I suppose. What old women call the horrors, have been creeping over me from head to foot. I have been afraid of myself.'

'You are afraid of nothing else, I think,' said I.

'Perhaps not, and yet may have enough to be afraid of too,' he answered. 'Well! So it goes by! I am not about to be hipped again, David; but I tell you, my good fellow, once more, that it would have been well for me (and for more than me) if I had had a steadfast and judicious father!'

His face was always full of expression, but I never saw it express such a dark kind of earnestness as when he said these words, with his glance bent on the fire.

'So much for that!' he said, making as if he tossed something light into the air, with his hand. "Why, being gone, I am a man again,' like Macbeth. And now for dinner! If I have not (Macbeth-like) broken up the feast with most admired disorder, Daisy.'

'But where are they all, I wonder!' said I.

'God knows,' said Steerforth. 'After strolling to the ferry looking for you, I strolled in here and found the place deserted. That set me thinking, and you found me thinking.'

The advent of Mrs Gummidge with a basket, explained how the house had happened to be empty. She had hurried out to buy something that was needed, against Mr Peggotty's return with the tide; and had left the door open in the meanwhile, lest Ham and little Em'ly, with whom it was an early night, should come home while she was gone. Steerforth, after very much improving Mrs Gummidge's spirits by a cheerful salutation and a jocose embrace, took my arm, and hurried me away.

He had improved his own spirits, no less than Mrs Gummidge's, for they were again at their usual flow, and he was full of vivacious conversation as we went along.

'And so,' he said, gaily, 'we abandon this buccaneer life tomorrow, do we?'

'So we agreed,' I returned. 'And our places by the coach are taken, you know.'

'Ay! there's no help for it, I suppose,' said Steerforth. 'I have almost forgotten that there is anything to do in the world but to go out tossing on the sea here. I wish there was not.'

'As long as the novelty should last,' said I, laughing.

'Like enough,' he returned; 'though there's a sarcastic meaning in that observation for an amiable piece of innocence like my young friend. Well! I dare say I am a capricious fellow, David. I know I am; but while the iron is hot, I can strike it vigorously too. I could pass a reasonably good examination already, as a pilot in these waters, I think.'

'Mr Peggotty says you are a wonder,' I returned.

'A nautical phenomenon, eh?' laughed Steerforth.

'Indeed he does, and you know how truly; I know how ardent you are in any pursuit you follow, and how easily you can master it. And that amazes me most in you, Steerforth- that you should be contented with such fitful uses of your powers.'

'Contented?' he answered, merrily. 'I am never contented, except with your freshness, my gentle Daisy. As to fitfulness, I have never learnt the art of binding myself to any of the wheels on which the Ixions of these days are turning round and round. I missed it somehow in a bad apprenticeship, and now don't care about it. - You know I have bought a boat down here?'

'What an extraordinary fellow you are, Steerforth!' I exclaimed, stopping - for this was the first I had heard of it. 'When you may never care to come near the place again!'

'I don't know that,' he returned. 'I have taken a fancy to the place. At all events,' walking me briskly on, 'I have bought a boat that was for sale - a clipper, Mr Peggotty says; and so she is - and Mr Peggotty will be master of her in my absence.'

'Now I understand you, Steerforth!' said I, exultingly. 'You pretend to have bought it for yourself, but you have really done so to confer a benefit on him. I might have known as much at first, knowing you. My dear kind Steerforth, how can I tell you what I think of your generosity?'

'Tush!' he answered, turning red. 'The less said, the better.'

'Didn't I know?' cried I, 'didn't I say that there was not a joy, or sorrow, or any emotion of such honest hearts that was indifferent to you?'

'Aye, aye,' he answered, 'you told me all that. There let it rest. We have said enough!'

Afraid of offending him by pursuing the subject when he made so light of it, I only pursued it in my thoughts as we went on at even a quicker pace than before.

'She must be newly rigged,' said Steerforth, 'and I shall leave Littimer behind to see it done, that I may know she is quite complete. Did I tell you Littimer had come down?'

'No.'

'Oh yes! came down this morning, with a letter from my mother.'

As our looks met, I observed that he was pale even to his lips, though he looked very steadily at me. I feared that some difference between him and his mother might have led to his being in the frame of mind in which I had found him at the solitary fireside. I hinted so.

'Oh no!' he said, shaking his head, and giving a slight laugh. 'Nothing of the sort! Yes. He is come down, that man of mine.'

'The same as ever?' said I.

'The same as ever,' said Steerforth. 'Distant and quiet as the North Pole. He shall see to the boat being fresh named. She's the 'Stormy Petrel' now. What does Mr Peggotty care for Stormy Petrels! I'll have her christened again.'

'By what name?' I asked.

'The 'Little Em'ly'.'

As he had continued to look steadily at me, I took it as a reminder that he objected to being extolled for his consideration. I could not

help showing in my face how much it pleased me, but I said little, and he resumed his usual smile, and seemed relieved.

'But see here,' he said, looking before us, 'where the original little Em'ly comes! And that fellow with her, eh? Upon my soul, he's a true knight. He never leaves her!'

Ham was a boat-builder in these days, having improved a natural ingenuity in that handicraft, until he had become a skilled workman. He was in his working-dress, and looked rugged enough, but manly withal, and a very fit protector for the blooming little creature at his side. Indeed, there was a frankness in his face, an honesty, and an undisguised show of his pride in her, and his love for her, which were, to me, the best of good looks. I thought, as they came towards us, that they were well matched even in that particular.

She withdrew her hand timidly from his arm as we stopped to speak to them, and blushed as she gave it to Steerforth and to me. When they passed on, after we had exchanged a few words, she did not like to replace that hand, but, still appearing timid and constrained, walked by herself. I thought all this very pretty and engaging, and Steerforth seemed to think so too, as we looked after them fading away in the light of a young moon.

Suddenly there passed us - evidently following them - a young woman whose approach we had not observed, but whose face I saw as she went by, and thought I had a faint remembrance of. She was lightly dressed; looked bold, and haggard, and flaunting, and poor; but seemed, for the time, to have given all that to the wind which was blowing, and to have nothing in her mind but going after them. As the dark distant level, absorbing their figures into itself, left but itself visible between us and the sea and clouds, her figure disappeared in like manner, still no nearer to them than before.

'That is a black shadow to be following the girl,' said Steerforth, standing still; 'what does it mean?'

He spoke in a low voice that sounded almost strange to Me.

'She must have it in her mind to beg of them, I think,' said I.

'A beggar would be no novelty,' said Steerforth; 'but it is a strange thing that the beggar should take that shape tonight.'

'Why?' I asked.

'For no better reason, truly, than because I was thinking,' he said, after a pause, 'of something like it, when it came by. Where the Devil did it come from, I wonder!'

'From the shadow of this wall, I think,' said I, as we emerged upon a road on which a wall abutted.

'It's gone!' he returned, looking over his shoulder. 'And all ill go with it. Now for our dinner!'

But he looked again over his shoulder towards the sea-line glimmering afar off, and yet again. And he wondered about it, in some broken expressions, several times, in the short remainder of our walk; and only seemed to forget it when the light of fire and candle shone upon us, seated warm and merry, at table.

Littimer was there, and had his usual effect upon me. When I said to him that I hoped Mrs Steerforth and Miss Dartle were well, he answered respectfully (and of course respectably), that they were tolerably well, he thanked me, and had sent their compliments. This was all, and yet he seemed to me to say as plainly as a man could say: 'You are very young, sir; you are exceedingly young.'

We had almost finished dinner, when taking a step or two towards the table, from the corner where he kept watch upon us, or rather upon me, as I felt, he said to his master:

'I beg your pardon, sir. Miss Mowcher is down here.'

'Who?' cried Steerforth, much astonished.

'Miss Mowcher, sir.'

'Why, what on earth does she do here?' said Steerforth.

'It appears to be her native part of the country, sir. She informs me that she makes one of her professional visits here, every year, sir. I met her in the street this afternoon, and she wished to know if she might have the honour of waiting on you after dinner, sir.'

'Do you know the Giantess in question, Daisy?' inquired Steerforth.

I was obliged to confess - I felt ashamed, even of being at this disadvantage before Littimer - that Miss Mowcher and I were wholly unacquainted.

'Then you shall know her,' said Steerforth, 'for she is one of the seven wonders of the world. When Miss Mowcher comes, show her in.'

I felt some curiosity and excitement about this lady, especially as Steerforth burst into a fit of laughing when I referred to her, and positively refused to answer any question of which I made her the subject. I remained, therefore, in a state of considerable expectation until the cloth had been removed some half an hour, and we were sitting over our decanter of wine before the fire, when the door opened, and Littimer, with his habitual serenity quite undisturbed, announced:

'Miss Mowcher!'

I looked at the doorway and saw nothing. I was still looking at the doorway, thinking that Miss Mowcher was a long while making her appearance, when, to my infinite astonishment, there came waddling round a sofa which stood between me and it, a pousy dwarf, of about forty or forty-five, with a very large head and face, a pair of roguish grey eyes, and such extremely little arms, that, to enable herself to lay a finger archly against her snub nose, as she ogled Steerforth, she was obliged to meet the finger half-way, and lay her nose against it. Her chin, which was what is called a double chin, was so fat that it entirely swallowed up the strings of her bonnet, bow and all. Throat she had none; waist she had none; legs she had none, worth mentioning; for though she was more than full-sized down to where her waist would have been, if she had had any, and though she terminated, as human beings generally do, in a pair of feet, she was so short that she stood at a common-sized chair as at a table, resting a bag she carried on the seat. This lady - dressed in an off-hand, easy style; bringing her nose and her forefinger together, with the difficulty I have described; standing with her head necessarily on one side, and, with one of her sharp eyes shut up, making an uncommonly knowing face - after ogling Steerforth for a few moments, broke into a torrent of words.

'What! My flower!' she pleasantly began, shaking her large head at him. 'You're there, are you! Oh, you naughty boy, fie for shame, what do you do so far away from home? Up to mischief, I'll be bound. Oh, you're a downy fellow, Steerforth, so you are, and I'm another, ain't I? Ha, ha, ha! You'd have betted a hundred pound to five, now, that you wouldn't have seen me here, wouldn't you? Bless you, man alive, I'm everywhere. I'm here and there, and where not, like the conjurer's half-crown in the lady's handkercher. Talking of handkerchers - and talking of ladies - what a comfort you are to your blessed mother, ain't you, my dear boy, over one of my shoulders, and I don't say which!'

Miss Mowcher untied her bonnet, at this passage of her discourse, threw back the strings, and sat down, panting, on a footstool in front of the fire - making a kind of arbour of the dining table, which spread its mahogany shelter above her head.

'Oh my stars and what's-their-names!' she went on, clapping a hand on each of her little knees, and glancing shrewdly at me, 'I'm of too full a habit, that's the fact, Steerforth. After a flight of stairs, it gives me as much trouble to draw every breath I want, as if it was a bucket of water. If you saw me looking out of an upper window, you'd think I was a fine woman, wouldn't you?'

'I should think that, wherever I saw you,' replied Steerforth.

'Go along, you dog, do!' cried the little creature, making a whisk at him with the handkerchief with which she was wiping her face, 'and don't be impudent! But I give you my word and honour I was at Lady Mithers's last week - THERE'S a woman! How SHE wears! - and Mithers himself came into the room where I was waiting for her - THERE'S a man! How HE wears! and his wig too, for he's had it these ten years - and he went on at that rate in the complimentary line, that I began to think I should be obliged to ring the bell. Ha! ha! ha! He's a pleasant wretch, but he wants principle.'

'What were you doing for Lady Mithers?' asked Steerforth.

'That's tellings, my blessed infant,' she retorted, tapping her nose again, screwing up her face, and twinkling her eyes like an imp of supernatural intelligence. 'Never YOU mind! You'd like to know whether I stop her hair from falling off, or dye it, or touch up her complexion, or improve her eyebrows, wouldn't you? And so you shall, my darling - when I tell you! Do you know what my great grandfather's name was?'

'No,' said Steerforth.

'It was Walker, my sweet pet,' replied Miss Mowcher, 'and he came of a long line of Walkers, that I inherit all the Hookey estates from.'

I never beheld anything approaching to Miss Mowcher's wink except Miss Mowcher's self-possession. She had a wonderful way too, when listening to what was said to her, or when waiting for an answer to what she had said herself, of pausing with her head cunningly on one side, and one eye turned up like a magpie's. Altogether I was lost in amazement, and sat staring at her, quite oblivious, I am afraid, of the laws of politeness.

She had by this time drawn the chair to her side, and was busily engaged in producing from the bag (plunging in her short arm to the shoulder, at every dive) a number of small bottles, sponges, combs, brushes, bits of flannel, little pairs of curling-irons, and other instruments, which she tumbled in a heap upon the chair. From this

employment she suddenly desisted, and said to Steerforth, much to my confusion:

'Who's your friend?'

'Mr Copperfield,' said Steerforth; 'he wants to know you.'

'Well, then, he shall! I thought he looked as if he did!' returned Miss Mowcher, waddling up to me, bag in hand, and laughing on me as she came. 'Face like a peach!' standing on tiptoe to pinch my cheek as I sat. 'Quite tempting! I'm very fond of peaches. Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr Copperfield, I'm sure.'

I said that I congratulated myself on having the honour to make hers, and that the happiness was mutual.

'Oh, my goodness, how polite we are!' exclaimed Miss Mowcher, making a preposterous attempt to cover her large face with her morsel of a hand. 'What a world of gammon and spinnage it is, though, ain't it!'

This was addressed confidentially to both of us, as the morsel of a hand came away from the face, and buried itself, arm and all, in the bag again.

'What do you mean, Miss Mowcher?' said Steerforth.

'Ha! ha! ha! What a refreshing set of humbugs we are, to be sure, ain't we, my sweet child?' replied that morsel of a woman, feeling in the bag with her head on one side and her eye in the air. 'Look here!' taking something out. 'Scraps of the Russian Prince's nails. Prince Alphabet turned topsy-turvy, I call him, for his name's got all the letters in it, higgledy-piggledy.'

'The Russian Prince is a client of yours, is he?' said Steerforth.

'I believe you, my pet,' replied Miss Mowcher. 'I keep his nails in order for him. Twice a week! Fingers and toes.'

'He pays well, I hope?' said Steerforth.

'Pays, as he speaks, my dear child - through the nose,' replied Miss Mowcher. 'None of your close shavers the Prince ain't. You'd say so, if you saw his moustachios. Red by nature, black by art.'

'By your art, of course,' said Steerforth.

Miss Mowcher winked assent. 'Forced to send for me. Couldn't help it. The climate affected his dye; it did very well in Russia, but it was no go here. You never saw such a rusty Prince in all your born days as he was. Like old iron!' 'Is that why you called him a humbug, just now?' inquired Steerforth.

'Oh, you're a broth of a boy, ain't you?' returned Miss Mowcher, shaking her head violently. 'I said, what a set of humbugs we were in general, and I showed you the scraps of the Prince's nails to prove it. The Prince's nails do more for me in private families of the genteel sort, than all my talents put together. I always carry 'em about. They're the best introduction. If Miss Mowcher cuts the Prince's nails, she must be all right. I give 'em away to the young ladies. They put 'em in albums, I believe. Ha! ha! ha! Upon my life, 'the whole social system' (as the men call it when they make speeches in Parliament) is a system of Prince's nails!' said this least of women, trying to fold her short arms, and nodding her large head.

Steerforth laughed heartily, and I laughed too. Miss Mowcher continuing all the time to shake her head (which was very much on one side), and to look into the air with one eye, and to wink with the other.

'Well, well!' she said, smiting her small knees, and rising, 'this is not business. Come, Steerforth, let's explore the polar regions, and have it over.'

She then selected two or three of the little instruments, and a little bottle, and asked (to my surprise) if the table would bear. On Steerforth's replying in the affirmative, she pushed a chair against it, and begging the assistance of my hand, mounted up, pretty nimbly, to the top, as if it were a stage.

'If either of you saw my ankles,' she said, when she was safely elevated, 'say so, and I'll go home and destroy myself!'

'I did not,' said Steerforth.

'I did not,' said I.

'Well then,' cried Miss Mowcher, 'I'll consent to live. Now, ducky, ducky, ducky, come to Mrs Bond and be killed.'

This was an invocation to Steerforth to place himself under her hands; who, accordingly, sat himself down, with his back to the table, and his laughing face towards me, and submitted his head to her inspection, evidently for no other purpose than our entertainment. To see Miss Mowcher standing over him, looking at his rich profusion of brown

hair through a large round magnifying glass, which she took out of her pocket, was a most amazing spectacle.

'You're a pretty fellow!' said Miss Mowcher, after a brief inspection. 'You'd be as bald as a friar on the top of your head in twelve months, but for me. Just half a minute, my young friend, and we'll give you a polishing that shall keep your curls on for the next ten years!'

With this, she tilted some of the contents of the little bottle on to one of the little bits of flannel, and, again imparting some of the virtues of that preparation to one of the little brushes, began rubbing and scraping away with both on the crown of Steerforth's head in the busiest manner I ever witnessed, talking all the time.

'There's Charley Pyegrave, the duke's son,' she said. 'You know Charley?' peeping round into his face.

'A little,' said Steerforth.

'What a man HE is! THERE'S a whisker! As to Charley's legs, if they were only a pair (which they ain't), they'd defy competition. Would you believe he tried to do without me - in the Life-Guards, too?'

'Mad!' said Steerforth.

'It looks like it. However, mad or sane, he tried,' returned Miss Mowcher. 'What does he do, but, lo and behold you, he goes into a perfumer's shop, and wants to buy a bottle of the Madagascar Liquid.'

'Charley does?' said Steerforth.

'Charley does. But they haven't got any of the Madagascar Liquid.'

'What is it? Something to drink?' asked Steerforth.

'To drink?' returned Miss Mowcher, stopping to slap his cheek. 'To doctor his own moustachios with, you know. There was a woman in the shop - elderly female - quite a Griffin - who had never even heard of it by name. 'Begging pardon, sir,' said the Griffin to Charley, 'it's not - not - not ROUGE, is it?' 'Rouge,' said Charley to the Griffin. 'What the unmentionable to ears polite, do you think I want with rouge?' 'No offence, sir,' said the Griffin; 'we have it asked for by so many names, I thought it might be.' Now that, my child,' continued Miss Mowcher, rubbing all the time as busily as ever, 'is another instance of the refreshing humbug I was speaking of. I do something in that way myself - perhaps a good deal - perhaps a little - sharp's the word, my dear boy - never mind!'

'In what way do you mean? In the rouge way?' said Steerforth.

'Put this and that together, my tender pupil,' returned the wary Mowcher, touching her nose, 'work it by the rule of Secrets in all trades, and the product will give you the desired result. I say I do a little in that way myself. One Dowager, SHE calls it lip-salve. Another, SHE calls it gloves. Another, SHE calls it tucker-edging. Another, SHE calls it a fan. I call it whatever THEY call it. I supply it for 'em, but we keep up the trick so, to one another, and make believe with such a face, that they'd as soon think of laying it on, before a whole drawing-room, as before me. And when I wait upon 'em, they'll say to me sometimes - WITH IT ON - thick, and no mistake - 'How am I looking, Mowcher? Am I pale?' Ha! ha! ha! ha! Isn't THAT refreshing, my young friend!'

I never did in my days behold anything like Mowcher as she stood upon the dining table, intensely enjoying this refreshment, rubbing busily at Steerforth's head, and winking at me over it.

'Ah!' she said. 'Such things are not much in demand hereabouts. That sets me off again! I haven't seen a pretty woman since I've been here, jemmy.'

'No?' said Steerforth.

'Not the ghost of one,' replied Miss Mowcher.

'We could show her the substance of one, I think?' said Steerforth, addressing his eyes to mine. 'Eh, Daisy?'

'Yes, indeed,' said I.

'Aha?' cried the little creature, glancing sharply at my face, and then peeping round at Steerforth's. 'Umph?'

The first exclamation sounded like a question put to both of us, and the second like a question put to Steerforth only. She seemed to have found no answer to either, but continued to rub, with her head on one side and her eye turned up, as if she were looking for an answer in the air and were confident of its appearing presently.

'A sister of yours, Mr Copperfield?' she cried, after a pause, and still keeping the same look-out. 'Aye, aye?'

'No,' said Steerforth, before I could reply. 'Nothing of the sort. On the contrary, Mr Copperfield used - or I am much mistaken - to have a great admiration for her.'

'Why, hasn't he now?' returned Miss Mowcher. 'Is he fickle? Oh, for shame! Did he sip every flower, and change every hour, until Polly his passion requited? - Is her name Polly?'

The Elfin suddenness with which she pounced upon me with this question, and a searching look, quite disconcerted me for a moment.

'No, Miss Mowcher,' I replied. 'Her name is Emily.'

'Aha?' she cried exactly as before. 'Umph? What a rattle I am! Mr Copperfield, ain't I volatile?'

Her tone and look implied something that was not agreeable to me in connexion with the subject. So I said, in a graver manner than any of us had yet assumed: 'She is as virtuous as she is pretty. She is engaged to be married to a most worthy and deserving man in her own station of life. I esteem her for her good sense, as much as I admire her for her good looks.'

'Well said!' cried Steerforth. 'Hear, hear, hear! Now I'll quench the curiosity of this little Fatima, my dear Daisy, by leaving her nothing to guess at. She is at present apprenticed, Miss Mowcher, or articed, or whatever it may be, to Omer and Joram, Haberdashers, Milliners, and so forth, in this town. Do you observe? Omer and Joram. The promise of which my friend has spoken, is made and entered into with her cousin; Christian name, Ham; surname, Peggotty; occupation, boat-builder; also of this town. She lives with a relative; Christian name, unknown; surname, Peggotty; occupation, seafaring; also of this town. She is the prettiest and most engaging little fairy in the world. I admire her - as my friend does - exceedingly. If it were not that I might appear to disparage her Intended, which I know my friend would not like, I would add, that to me she seems to be throwing herself away; that I am sure she might do better; and that I swear she was born to be a lady.'

Miss Mowcher listened to these words, which were very slowly and distinctly spoken, with her head on one side, and her eye in the air as if she were still looking for that answer. When he ceased she became brisk again in an instant, and rattled away with surprising volubility.

'Oh! And that's all about it, is it?' she exclaimed, trimming his whiskers with a little restless pair of scissors, that went glancing round his head in all directions. 'Very well: very well! Quite a long story. Ought to end 'and they lived happy ever afterwards'; oughtn't it? Ah! What's that game at forfeits? I love my love with an E, because she's enticing; I hate her with an E, because she's engaged. I took her to the sign of the exquisite, and treated her with an elopement, her

name's Emily, and she lives in the east? Ha! ha! ha! Mr Copperfield, ain't I volatile?

Merely looking at me with extravagant slyness, and not waiting for any reply, she continued, without drawing breath:

'There! If ever any scapegrace was trimmed and touched up to perfection, you are, Steerforth. If I understand any noddle in the world, I understand yours. Do you hear me when I tell you that, my darling? I understand yours,' peeping down into his face. 'Now you may mizzle, jemmy (as we say at Court), and if Mr Copperfield will take the chair I'll operate on him.'

'What do you say, Daisy?' inquired Steerforth, laughing, and resigning his seat. 'Will you be improved?'

'Thank you, Miss Mowcher, not this evening.'

'Don't say no,' returned the little woman, looking at me with the aspect of a connoisseur; 'a little bit more eyebrow?'

'Thank you,' I returned, 'some other time.'

'Have it carried half a quarter of an inch towards the temple,' said Miss Mowcher. 'We can do it in a fortnight.'

'No, I thank you. Not at present.'

'Go in for a tip,' she urged. 'No? Let's get the scaffolding up, then, for a pair of whiskers. Come!'

I could not help blushing as I declined, for I felt we were on my weak point, now. But Miss Mowcher, finding that I was not at present disposed for any decoration within the range of her art, and that I was, for the time being, proof against the blandishments of the small bottle which she held up before one eye to enforce her persuasions, said we would make a beginning on an early day, and requested the aid of my hand to descend from her elevated station. Thus assisted, she skipped down with much agility, and began to tie her double chin into her bonnet.

'The fee,' said Steerforth, 'is -'

'Five bob,' replied Miss Mowcher, 'and dirt cheap, my chicken. Ain't I volatile, Mr Copperfield?'

I replied politely: 'Not at all.' But I thought she was rather so, when she tossed up his two half-crowns like a goblin pieman, caught them, dropped them in her pocket, and gave it a loud slap.

'That's the Till!' observed Miss Mowcher, standing at the chair again, and replacing in the bag a miscellaneous collection of little objects she had emptied out of it. 'Have I got all my traps? It seems so. It won't do to be like long Ned Beadwood, when they took him to church 'to marry him to somebody', as he says, and left the bride behind. Ha! ha! ha! A wicked rascal, Ned, but droll! Now, I know I'm going to break your hearts, but I am forced to leave you. You must call up all your fortitude, and try to bear it. Good-bye, Mr Copperfield! Take care of yourself, jockey of Norfolk! How I have been rattling on! It's all the fault of you two wretches. I forgive you! 'Bob swore!' - as the Englishman said for 'Good night', when he first learnt French, and thought it so like English. 'Bob swore,' my ducks!'

With the bag slung over her arm, and rattling as she waddled away, she waddled to the door, where she stopped to inquire if she should leave us a lock of her hair. 'Ain't I volatile?' she added, as a commentary on this offer, and, with her finger on her nose, departed.

Steerforth laughed to that degree, that it was impossible for me to help laughing too; though I am not sure I should have done so, but for this inducement. When we had had our laugh quite out, which was after some time, he told me that Miss Mowcher had quite an extensive connexion, and made herself useful to a variety of people in a variety of ways. Some people trifled with her as a mere oddity, he said; but she was as shrewdly and sharply observant as anyone he knew, and as long-headed as she was short-armed. He told me that what she had said of being here, and there, and everywhere, was true enough; for she made little darts into the provinces, and seemed to pick up customers everywhere, and to know everybody. I asked him what her disposition was: whether it was at all mischievous, and if her sympathies were generally on the right side of things: but, not succeeding in attracting his attention to these questions after two or three attempts, I forbore or forgot to repeat them. He told me instead, with much rapidity, a good deal about her skill, and her profits; and about her being a scientific cupper, if I should ever have occasion for her service in that capacity.

She was the principal theme of our conversation during the evening: and when we parted for the night Steerforth called after me over the banisters, 'Bob swore!' as I went downstairs.

I was surprised, when I came to Mr Barkis's house, to find Ham walking up and down in front of it, and still more surprised to learn

from him that little Em'ly was inside. I naturally inquired why he was not there too, instead of pacing the streets by himself?

'Why, you see, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined, in a hesitating manner, 'Em'ly, she's talking to some 'un in here.'

'I should have thought,' said I, smiling, 'that that was a reason for your being in here too, Ham.'

'Well, Mas'r Davy, in a general way, so 't would be,' he returned; 'but look'ee here, Mas'r Davy,' lowering his voice, and speaking very gravely. 'It's a young woman, sir - a young woman, that Em'ly knowed once, and doesn't ought to know no more.'

When I heard these words, a light began to fall upon the figure I had seen following them, some hours ago.

'It's a poor wurem, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, 'as is trod under foot by all the town. Up street and down street. The mowld o' the churchyard don't hold any that the folk shrink away from, more.'

'Did I see her tonight, Ham, on the sand, after we met you?'

'Keeping us in sight?' said Ham. 'It's like you did, Mas'r Davy. Not that I know'd then, she was theer, sir, but along of her creeping soon arterwards under Em'ly's little winder, when she see the light come, and whispering 'Em'ly, Em'ly, for Christ's sake, have a woman's heart towards me. I was once like you!' Those was solemn words, Mas'r Davy, fur to hear!'

'They were indeed, Ham. What did Em'ly do?' 'Says Em'ly, 'Martha, is it you? Oh, Martha, can it be you?' - for they had sat at work together, many a day, at Mr Omer's.'

'I recollect her now!' cried I, recalling one of the two girls I had seen when I first went there. 'I recollect her quite well!'

'Martha Endell,' said Ham. 'Two or three year older than Em'ly, but was at the school with her.'

'I never heard her name,' said I. 'I didn't mean to interrupt you.'

'For the matter o' that, Mas'r Davy,' replied Ham, 'all's told a'most in them words, 'Em'ly, Em'ly, for Christ's sake, have a woman's heart towards me. I was once like you!' She wanted to speak to Em'ly. Em'ly couldn't speak to her theer, for her loving uncle was come home, and he wouldn't - no, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, with great earnestness, 'he

couldn't, kind-natur'd, tender-hearted as he is, see them two together, side by side, for all the treasures that's wrecked in the sea.'

I felt how true this was. I knew it, on the instant, quite as well as Ham.

'So Em'ly writes in pencil on a bit of paper,' he pursued, 'and gives it to her out o' winder to bring here. 'Show that,' she says, 'to my aunt, Mrs Barkis, and she'll set you down by her fire, for the love of me, till uncle is gone out, and I can come.' By and by she tells me what I tell you, Mas'r Davy, and asks me to bring her. What can I do? She doesn't ought to know any such, but I can't deny her, when the tears is on her face.'

He put his hand into the breast of his shaggy jacket, and took out with great care a pretty little purse.

'And if I could deny her when the tears was on her face, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, tenderly adjusting it on the rough palm of his hand, 'how could I deny her when she give me this to carry for her - knowing what she brought it for? Such a toy as it is!' said Ham, thoughtfully looking on it. 'With such a little money in it, Em'ly my dear.'

I shook him warmly by the hand when he had put it away again - for that was more satisfactory to me than saying anything - and we walked up and down, for a minute or two, in silence. The door opened then, and Peggotty appeared, beckoning to Ham to come in. I would have kept away, but she came after me, entreating me to come in too. Even then, I would have avoided the room where they all were, but for its being the neat-tiled kitchen I have mentioned more than once. The door opening immediately into it, I found myself among them before I considered whither I was going.

The girl - the same I had seen upon the sands - was near the fire. She was sitting on the ground, with her head and one arm lying on a chair. I fancied, from the disposition of her figure, that Em'ly had but newly risen from the chair, and that the forlorn head might perhaps have been lying on her lap. I saw but little of the girl's face, over which her hair fell loose and scattered, as if she had been disordering it with her own hands; but I saw that she was young, and of a fair complexion. Peggotty had been crying. So had little Em'ly. Not a word was spoken when we first went in; and the Dutch clock by the dresser seemed, in the silence, to tick twice as loud as usual. Em'ly spoke first.

'Martha wants,' she said to Ham, 'to go to London.'

'Why to London?' returned Ham.

He stood between them, looking on the prostrate girl with a mixture of compassion for her, and of jealousy of her holding any companionship with her whom he loved so well, which I have always remembered distinctly. They both spoke as if she were ill; in a soft, suppressed tone that was plainly heard, although it hardly rose above a whisper.

'Better there than here,' said a third voice aloud - Martha's, though she did not move. 'No one knows me there. Everybody knows me here.'

'What will she do there?' inquired Ham.

She lifted up her head, and looked darkly round at him for a moment; then laid it down again, and curved her right arm about her neck, as a woman in a fever, or in an agony of pain from a shot, might twist herself.

'She will try to do well,' said little Em'ly. 'You don't know what she has said to us. Does he - do they - aunt?'

Peggotty shook her head compassionately.

'I'll try,' said Martha, 'if you'll help me away. I never can do worse than I have done here. I may do better. Oh!' with a dreadful shiver, 'take me out of these streets, where the whole town knows me from a child!'

As Em'ly held out her hand to Ham, I saw him put in it a little canvas bag. She took it, as if she thought it were her purse, and made a step or two forward; but finding her mistake, came back to where he had retired near me, and showed it to him.

'It's all yourn, Em'ly,' I could hear him say. 'I haven't nowt in all the wureld that ain't yourn, my dear. It ain't of no delight to me, except for you!'

The tears rose freshly in her eyes, but she turned away and went to Martha. What she gave her, I don't know. I saw her stooping over her, and putting money in her bosom. She whispered something, as she asked was that enough? 'More than enough,' the other said, and took her hand and kissed it.

Then Martha arose, and gathering her shawl about her, covering her face with it, and weeping aloud, went slowly to the door. She stopped a moment before going out, as if she would have uttered something or turned back; but no word passed her lips. Making the same low, dreary, wretched moaning in her shawl, she went away.

As the door closed, little Em'ly looked at us three in a hurried manner and then hid her face in her hands, and fell to sobbing.

'Doen't, Em'ly!' said Ham, tapping her gently on the shoulder. 'Doen't, my dear! You doen't ought to cry so, pretty!'

'Oh, Ham!' she exclaimed, still weeping pitifully, 'I am not so good a girl as I ought to be! I know I have not the thankful heart, sometimes, I ought to have!'

'Yes, yes, you have, I'm sure,' said Ham.

'No! no! no!' cried little Em'ly, sobbing, and shaking her head. 'I am not as good a girl as I ought to be. Not near! not near!' And still she cried, as if her heart would break.

'I try your love too much. I know I do!' she sobbed. 'I'm often cross to you, and changeable with you, when I ought to be far different. You are never so to me. Why am I ever so to you, when I should think of nothing but how to be grateful, and to make you happy!'

'You always make me so,' said Ham, 'my dear! I am happy in the sight of you. I am happy, all day long, in the thoughts of you.'

'Ah! that's not enough!' she cried. 'That is because you are good; not because I am! Oh, my dear, it might have been a better fortune for you, if you had been fond of someone else - of someone steadier and much worthier than me, who was all bound up in you, and never vain and changeable like me!'

'Poor little tender-heart,' said Ham, in a low voice. 'Martha has overset her, altogether.'

'Please, aunt,' sobbed Em'ly, 'come here, and let me lay my head upon you. Oh, I am very miserable tonight, aunt! Oh, I am not as good a girl as I ought to be. I am not, I know!'

Peggotty had hastened to the chair before the fire. Em'ly, with her arms around her neck, kneeled by her, looking up most earnestly into her face.

'Oh, pray, aunt, try to help me! Ham, dear, try to help me! Mr David, for the sake of old times, do, please, try to help me! I want to be a better girl than I am. I want to feel a hundred times more thankful than I do. I want to feel more, what a blessed thing it is to be the wife of a good man, and to lead a peaceful life. Oh me, oh me! Oh my heart, my heart!' She dropped her face on my old nurse's breast, and, ceasing this supplication, which in its agony and grief was half a woman's, half a child's, as all her manner was (being, in that, more natural, and better suited to her beauty, as I thought, than any other

manner could have been), wept silently, while my old nurse hushed her like an infant.

She got calmer by degrees, and then we soothed her; now talking encouragingly, and now jesting a little with her, until she began to raise her head and speak to us. So we got on, until she was able to smile, and then to laugh, and then to sit up, half ashamed; while Peggotty recalled her stray ringlets, dried her eyes, and made her neat again, lest her uncle should wonder, when she got home, why his darling had been crying.

I saw her do, that night, what I had never seen her do before. I saw her innocently kiss her chosen husband on the cheek, and creep close to his bluff form as if it were her best support. When they went away together, in the waning moonlight, and I looked after them, comparing their departure in my mind with Martha's, I saw that she held his arm with both her hands, and still kept close to him.