

Chapter XXXVIII - A Dissolution Of Partnership

I did not allow my resolution, with respect to the Parliamentary Debates, to cool. It was one of the irons I began to heat immediately, and one of the irons I kept hot, and hammered at, with a perseverance I may honestly admire. I bought an approved scheme of the noble art and mystery of stenography (which cost me ten and sixpence); and plunged into a sea of perplexity that brought me, in a few weeks, to the confines of distraction. The changes that were rung upon dots, which in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position something else, entirely different; the wonderful vagaries that were played by circles; the unaccountable consequences that resulted from marks like flies' legs; the tremendous effects of a curve in a wrong place; not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in my sleep. When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties, and had mastered the alphabet, which was an Egyptian Temple in itself, there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters; the most despotic characters I have ever known; who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb, meant expectation, and that a pen-and-ink sky-rocket, stood for disadvantageous. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I found that they had driven everything else out of it; then, beginning again, I forgot them; while I was picking them up, I dropped the other fragments of the system; in short, it was almost heart-breaking.

It might have been quite heart-breaking, but for Dora, who was the stay and anchor of my tempest-driven bark. Every scratch in the scheme was a gnarled oak in the forest of difficulty, and I went on cutting them down, one after another, with such vigour, that in three or four months I was in a condition to make an experiment on one of our crack speakers in the Commons. Shall I ever forget how the crack speaker walked off from me before I began, and left my imbecile pencil staggering about the paper as if it were in a fit!

This would not do, it was quite clear. I was flying too high, and should never get on, so. I resorted to Traddles for advice; who suggested that he should dictate speeches to me, at a pace, and with occasional stoppages, adapted to my weakness. Very grateful for this friendly aid, I accepted the proposal; and night after night, almost every night, for a long time, we had a sort of Private Parliament in Buckingham Street, after I came home from the Doctor's.

I should like to see such a Parliament anywhere else! My aunt and Mr Dick represented the Government or the Opposition (as the case might be), and Traddles, with the assistance of Enfield's Speakers, or a volume of parliamentary orations, thundered astonishing invectives against them. Standing by the table, with his finger in the page to

keep the place, and his right arm flourishing above his head, Traddles, as Mr Pitt, Mr Fox, Mr Sheridan, Mr Burke, Lord Castlereagh, Viscount Sidmouth, or Mr Canning, would work himself into the most violent heats, and deliver the most withering denunciations of the profligacy and corruption of my aunt and Mr Dick; while I used to sit, at a little distance, with my notebook on my knee, fagging after him with all my might and main. The inconsistency and recklessness of Traddles were not to be exceeded by any real politician. He was for any description of policy, in the compass of a week; and nailed all sorts of colours to every denomination of mast. My aunt, looking very like an immovable Chancellor of the Exchequer, would occasionally throw in an interruption or two, as 'Hear!' or 'No!' or 'Oh!' when the text seemed to require it: which was always a signal to Mr Dick (a perfect country gentleman) to follow lustily with the same cry. But Mr Dick got taxed with such things in the course of his Parliamentary career, and was made responsible for such awful consequences, that he became uncomfortable in his mind sometimes. I believe he actually began to be afraid he really had been doing something, tending to the annihilation of the British constitution, and the ruin of the country.

Often and often we pursued these debates until the clock pointed to midnight, and the candles were burning down. The result of so much good practice was, that by and by I began to keep pace with Traddles pretty well, and should have been quite triumphant if I had had the least idea what my notes were about. But, as to reading them after I had got them, I might as well have copied the Chinese inscriptions of an immense collection of tea-chests, or the golden characters on all the great red and green bottles in the chemists' shops!

There was nothing for it, but to turn back and begin all over again. It was very hard, but I turned back, though with a heavy heart, and began laboriously and methodically to plod over the same tedious ground at a snail's pace; stopping to examine minutely every speck in the way, on all sides, and making the most desperate efforts to know these elusive characters by sight wherever I met them. I was always punctual at the office; at the Doctor's too: and I really did work, as the common expression is, like a cart-horse. One day, when I went to the Commons as usual, I found Mr Spenlow in the doorway looking extremely grave, and talking to himself. As he was in the habit of complaining of pains in his head - he had naturally a short throat, and I do seriously believe he over-starved himself - I was at first alarmed by the idea that he was not quite right in that direction; but he soon relieved my uneasiness.

Instead of returning my 'Good morning' with his usual affability, he looked at me in a distant, ceremonious manner, and coldly requested me to accompany him to a certain coffee-house, which, in those days,

had a door opening into the Commons, just within the little archway in St. Paul's Churchyard. I complied, in a very uncomfortable state, and with a warm shooting all over me, as if my apprehensions were breaking out into buds. When I allowed him to go on a little before, on account of the narrowness of the way, I observed that he carried his head with a lofty air that was particularly unpromising; and my mind misgave me that he had found out about my darling Dora.

If I had not guessed this, on the way to the coffee-house, I could hardly have failed to know what was the matter when I followed him into an upstairs room, and found Miss Murdstone there, supported by a background of sideboard, on which were several inverted tumblers sustaining lemons, and two of those extraordinary boxes, all corners and flutings, for sticking knives and forks in, which, happily for mankind, are now obsolete.

Miss Murdstone gave me her chilly finger-nails, and sat severely rigid. Mr Spenlow shut the door, motioned me to a chair, and stood on the hearth-rug in front of the fireplace.

'Have the goodness to show Mr Copperfield,' said Mr Spenlow, what you have in your reticule, Miss Murdstone.'

I believe it was the old identical steel-clasped reticule of my childhood, that shut up like a bite. Compressing her lips, in sympathy with the snap, Miss Murdstone opened it - opening her mouth a little at the same time - and produced my last letter to Dora, teeming with expressions of devoted affection.

'I believe that is your writing, Mr Copperfield?' said Mr Spenlow.

I was very hot, and the voice I heard was very unlike mine, when I said, 'It is, sir!'

'If I am not mistaken,' said Mr Spenlow, as Miss Murdstone brought a parcel of letters out of her reticule, tied round with the dearest bit of blue ribbon, 'those are also from your pen, Mr Copperfield?'

I took them from her with a most desolate sensation; and, glancing at such phrases at the top, as 'My ever dearest and own Dora,' 'My best beloved angel,' 'My blessed one for ever,' and the like, blushed deeply, and inclined my head.

'No, thank you!' said Mr Spenlow, coldly, as I mechanically offered them back to him. 'I will not deprive you of them. Miss Murdstone, be so good as to proceed!'

That gentle creature, after a moment's thoughtful survey of the carpet, delivered herself with much dry unction as follows.

'I must confess to having entertained my suspicions of Miss Spenlow, in reference to David Copperfield, for some time. I observed Miss Spenlow and David Copperfield, when they first met; and the impression made upon me then was not agreeable. The depravity of the human heart is such -'

'You will oblige me, ma'am,' interrupted Mr Spenlow, 'by confining yourself to facts.'

Miss Murdstone cast down her eyes, shook her head as if protesting against this unseemly interruption, and with frowning dignity resumed:

'Since I am to confine myself to facts, I will state them as dryly as I can. Perhaps that will be considered an acceptable course of proceeding. I have already said, sir, that I have had my suspicions of Miss Spenlow, in reference to David Copperfield, for some time. I have frequently endeavoured to find decisive corroboration of those suspicions, but without effect. I have therefore forborne to mention them to Miss Spenlow's father'; looking severely at him- 'knowing how little disposition there usually is in such cases, to acknowledge the conscientious discharge of duty.'

Mr Spenlow seemed quite cowed by the gentlemanly sternness of Miss Murdstone's manner, and deprecated her severity with a conciliatory little wave of his hand.

'On my return to Norwood, after the period of absence occasioned by my brother's marriage,' pursued Miss Murdstone in a disdainful voice, 'and on the return of Miss Spenlow from her visit to her friend Miss Mills, I imagined that the manner of Miss Spenlow gave me greater occasion for suspicion than before. Therefore I watched Miss Spenlow closely.'

Dear, tender little Dora, so unconscious of this Dragon's eye!

'Still,' resumed Miss Murdstone, 'I found no proof until last night. It appeared to me that Miss Spenlow received too many letters from her friend Miss Mills; but Miss Mills being her friend with her father's full concurrence,' another telling blow at Mr Spenlow, 'it was not for me to interfere. If I may not be permitted to allude to the natural depravity of the human heart, at least I may - I must - be permitted, so far to refer to misplaced confidence.'

Mr Spenlow apologetically murmured his assent.

'Last evening after tea,' pursued Miss Murdstone, 'I observed the little dog starting, rolling, and growling about the drawing-room, worrying something. I said to Miss Spenlow, 'Dora, what is that the dog has in his mouth? It's paper.' Miss Spenlow immediately put her hand to her frock, gave a sudden cry, and ran to the dog. I interposed, and said, 'Dora, my love, you must permit me.'

Oh Jip, miserable Spaniel, this wretchedness, then, was your work!

'Miss Spenlow endeavoured,' said Miss Murdstone, 'to bribe me with kisses, work-boxes, and small articles of jewellery - that, of course, I pass over. The little dog retreated under the sofa on my approaching him, and was with great difficulty dislodged by the fire-irons. Even when dislodged, he still kept the letter in his mouth; and on my endeavouring to take it from him, at the imminent risk of being bitten, he kept it between his teeth so pertinaciously as to suffer himself to be held suspended in the air by means of the document. At length I obtained possession of it. After perusing it, I taxed Miss Spenlow with having many such letters in her possession; and ultimately obtained from her the packet which is now in David Copperfield's hand.'

Here she ceased; and snapping her reticule again, and shutting her mouth, looked as if she might be broken, but could never be bent.

'You have heard Miss Murdstone,' said Mr Spenlow, turning to me. 'I beg to ask, Mr Copperfield, if you have anything to say in reply?'

The picture I had before me, of the beautiful little treasure of my heart, sobbing and crying all night - of her being alone, frightened, and wretched, then - of her having so piteously begged and prayed that stony-hearted woman to forgive her - of her having vainly offered her those kisses, work-boxes, and trinkets - of her being in such grievous distress, and all for me - very much impaired the little dignity I had been able to muster. I am afraid I was in a tremulous state for a minute or so, though I did my best to disguise it.

'There is nothing I can say, sir,' I returned, 'except that all the blame is mine. Dora -'

'Miss Spenlow, if you please,' said her father, majestically.

'- was induced and persuaded by me,' I went on, swallowing that colder designation, 'to consent to this concealment, and I bitterly regret it.'

'You are very much to blame, sir,' said Mr Spenlow, walking to and fro upon the hearth-rug, and emphasizing what he said with his whole body instead of his head, on account of the stiffness of his cravat and

spine. 'You have done a stealthy and unbecoming action, Mr Copperfield. When I take a gentleman to my house, no matter whether he is nineteen, twenty-nine, or ninety, I take him there in a spirit of confidence. If he abuses my confidence, he commits a dishonourable action, Mr Copperfield.'

'I feel it, sir, I assure you,' I returned. 'But I never thought so, before. Sincerely, honestly, indeed, Mr Spenlow, I never thought so, before. I love Miss Spenlow to that extent -'

'Pooh! nonsense!' said Mr Spenlow, reddening. 'Pray don't tell me to my face that you love my daughter, Mr Copperfield!'

'Could I defend my conduct if I did not, sir?' I returned, with all humility.

'Can you defend your conduct if you do, sir?' said Mr Spenlow, stopping short upon the hearth-rug. 'Have you considered your years, and my daughter's years, Mr Copperfield? Have you considered what it is to undermine the confidence that should subsist between my daughter and myself? Have you considered my daughter's station in life, the projects I may contemplate for her advancement, the testamentary intentions I may have with reference to her? Have you considered anything, Mr Copperfield?'

'Very little, sir, I am afraid;' I answered, speaking to him as respectfully and sorrowfully as I felt; 'but pray believe me, I have considered my own worldly position. When I explained it to you, we were already engaged -'

'I BEG,' said Mr Spenlow, more like Punch than I had ever seen him, as he energetically struck one hand upon the other - I could not help noticing that even in my despair; 'that YOU Will NOT talk to me of engagements, Mr Copperfield!'

The otherwise immovable Miss Murdstone laughed contemptuously in one short syllable.

'When I explained my altered position to you, sir,' I began again, substituting a new form of expression for what was so unpalatable to him, 'this concealment, into which I am so unhappy as to have led Miss Spenlow, had begun. Since I have been in that altered position, I have strained every nerve, I have exerted every energy, to improve it. I am sure I shall improve it in time. Will you grant me time - any length of time? We are both so young, sir, -'

'You are right,' interrupted Mr Spenlow, nodding his head a great many times, and frowning very much, 'you are both very young. It's all

nonsense. Let there be an end of the nonsense. Take away those letters, and throw them in the fire. Give me Miss Spenlow's letters to throw in the fire; and although our future intercourse must, you are aware, be restricted to the Commons here, we will agree to make no further mention of the past. Come, Mr Copperfield, you don't want sense; and this is the sensible course.'

No. I couldn't think of agreeing to it. I was very sorry, but there was a higher consideration than sense. Love was above all earthly considerations, and I loved Dora to idolatry, and Dora loved me. I didn't exactly say so; I softened it down as much as I could; but I implied it, and I was resolute upon it. I don't think I made myself very ridiculous, but I know I was resolute.

'Very well, Mr Copperfield,' said Mr Spenlow, 'I must try my influence with my daughter.'

Miss Murdstone, by an expressive sound, a long drawn respiration, which was neither a sigh nor a moan, but was like both, gave it as her opinion that he should have done this at first.

'I must try,' said Mr Spenlow, confirmed by this support, 'my influence with my daughter. Do you decline to take those letters, Mr Copperfield?' For I had laid them on the table.

Yes. I told him I hoped he would not think it wrong, but I couldn't possibly take them from Miss Murdstone.

'Nor from me?' said Mr Spenlow.

No, I replied with the profoundest respect; nor from him.

'Very well!' said Mr Spenlow.

A silence succeeding, I was undecided whether to go or stay. At length I was moving quietly towards the door, with the intention of saying that perhaps I should consult his feelings best by withdrawing: when he said, with his hands in his coat pockets, into which it was as much as he could do to get them; and with what I should call, upon the whole, a decidedly pious air:

'You are probably aware, Mr Copperfield, that I am not altogether destitute of worldly possessions, and that my daughter is my nearest and dearest relative?'

I hurriedly made him a reply to the effect, that I hoped the error into which I had been betrayed by the desperate nature of my love, did not induce him to think me mercenary too?

'I don't allude to the matter in that light,' said Mr Spenlow. 'It would be better for yourself, and all of us, if you WERE mercenary, Mr Copperfield - I mean, if you were more discreet and less influenced by all this youthful nonsense. No. I merely say, with quite another view, you are probably aware I have some property to bequeath to my child?'

I certainly supposed so.

'And you can hardly think,' said Mr Spenlow, 'having experience of what we see, in the Commons here, every day, of the various unaccountable and negligent proceedings of men, in respect of their testamentary arrangements - of all subjects, the one on which perhaps the strangest revelations of human inconsistency are to be met with - but that mine are made?'

I inclined my head in acquiescence.

'I should not allow,' said Mr Spenlow, with an evident increase of pious sentiment, and slowly shaking his head as he poised himself upon his toes and heels alternately, 'my suitable provision for my child to be influenced by a piece of youthful folly like the present. It is mere folly. Mere nonsense. In a little while, it will weigh lighter than any feather. But I might - I might - if this silly business were not completely relinquished altogether, be induced in some anxious moment to guard her from, and surround her with protections against, the consequences of any foolish step in the way of marriage. Now, Mr Copperfield, I hope that you will not render it necessary for me to open, even for a quarter of an hour, that closed page in the book of life, and unsettle, even for a quarter of an hour, grave affairs long since composed.'

There was a serenity, a tranquillity, a calm sunset air about him, which quite affected me. He was so peaceful and resigned - clearly had his affairs in such perfect train, and so systematically wound up - that he was a man to feel touched in the contemplation of. I really think I saw tears rise to his eyes, from the depth of his own feeling of all this.

But what could I do? I could not deny Dora and my own heart. When he told me I had better take a week to consider of what he had said, how could I say I wouldn't take a week, yet how could I fail to know that no amount of weeks could influence such love as mine?

'In the meantime, confer with Miss Trotwood, or with any person with any knowledge of life,' said Mr Spenlow, adjusting his cravat with both hands. 'Take a week, Mr Copperfield.'

I submitted; and, with a countenance as expressive as I was able to make it of dejected and despairing constancy, came out of the room. Miss Murdstone's heavy eyebrows followed me to the door - I say her eyebrows rather than her eyes, because they were much more important in her face - and she looked so exactly as she used to look, at about that hour of the morning, in our parlour at Blunderstone, that I could have fancied I had been breaking down in my lessons again, and that the dead weight on my mind was that horrible old spelling-book, with oval woodcuts, shaped, to my youthful fancy, like the glasses out of spectacles.

When I got to the office, and, shutting out old Tiffey and the rest of them with my hands, sat at my desk, in my own particular nook, thinking of this earthquake that had taken place so unexpectedly, and in the bitterness of my spirit cursing Jip, I fell into such a state of torment about Dora, that I wonder I did not take up my hat and rush insanely to Norwood. The idea of their frightening her, and making her cry, and of my not being there to comfort her, was so excruciating, that it impelled me to write a wild letter to Mr Spenlow, beseeching him not to visit upon her the consequences of my awful destiny. I implored him to spare her gentle nature - not to crush a fragile flower - and addressed him generally, to the best of my remembrance, as if, instead of being her father, he had been an Ogre, or the Dragon of Wantley.³ This letter I sealed and laid upon his desk before he returned; and when he came in, I saw him, through the half-opened door of his room, take it up and read it.

He said nothing about it all the morning; but before he went away in the afternoon he called me in, and told me that I need not make myself at all uneasy about his daughter's happiness. He had assured her, he said, that it was all nonsense; and he had nothing more to say to her. He believed he was an indulgent father (as indeed he was), and I might spare myself any solicitude on her account.

'You may make it necessary, if you are foolish or obstinate, Mr Copperfield,' he observed, 'for me to send my daughter abroad again, for a term; but I have a better opinion of you. I hope you will be wiser than that, in a few days. As to Miss Murdstone,' for I had alluded to her in the letter, 'I respect that lady's vigilance, and feel obliged to her; but she has strict charge to avoid the subject. All I desire, Mr Copperfield, is, that it should be forgotten. All you have got to do, Mr Copperfield, is to forget it.'

All! In the note I wrote to Miss Mills, I bitterly quoted this sentiment. All I had to do, I said, with gloomy sarcasm, was to forget Dora. That was all, and what was that! I entreated Miss Mills to see me, that evening. If it could not be done with Mr Mills's sanction and concurrence, I besought a clandestine interview in the back kitchen

where the Mangle was. I informed her that my reason was tottering on its throne, and only she, Miss Mills, could prevent its being deposed. I signed myself, hers distractedly; and I couldn't help feeling, while I read this composition over, before sending it by a porter, that it was something in the style of Mr Micawber.

However, I sent it. At night I repaired to Miss Mills's street, and walked up and down, until I was stealthily fetched in by Miss Mills's maid, and taken the area way to the back kitchen. I have since seen reason to believe that there was nothing on earth to prevent my going in at the front door, and being shown up into the drawing-room, except Miss Mills's love of the romantic and mysterious.

In the back kitchen, I raved as became me. I went there, I suppose, to make a fool of myself, and I am quite sure I did it. Miss Mills had received a hasty note from Dora, telling her that all was discovered, and saying. 'Oh pray come to me, Julia, do, do!' But Miss Mills, mistrusting the acceptability of her presence to the higher powers, had not yet gone; and we were all benighted in the Desert of Sahara.

Miss Mills had a wonderful flow of words, and liked to pour them out. I could not help feeling, though she mingled her tears with mine, that she had a dreadful luxury in our afflictions. She petted them, as I may say, and made the most of them. A deep gulf, she observed, had opened between Dora and me, and Love could only span it with its rainbow. Love must suffer in this stern world; it ever had been so, it ever would be so. No matter, Miss Mills remarked. Hearts confined by cobwebs would burst at last, and then Love was avenged.

This was small consolation, but Miss Mills wouldn't encourage fallacious hopes. She made me much more wretched than I was before, and I felt (and told her with the deepest gratitude) that she was indeed a friend. We resolved that she should go to Dora the first thing in the morning, and find some means of assuring her, either by looks or words, of my devotion and misery. We parted, overwhelmed with grief; and I think Miss Mills enjoyed herself completely.

I confided all to my aunt when I got home; and in spite of all she could say to me, went to bed despairing. I got up despairing, and went out despairing. It was Saturday morning, and I went straight to the Commons.

I was surprised, when I came within sight of our office-door, to see the ticket-porters standing outside talking together, and some half-dozen stragglers gazing at the windows which were shut up. I quickened my pace, and, passing among them, wondering at their looks, went hurriedly in.

The clerks were there, but nobody was doing anything. Old Tiffey, for the first time in his life I should think, was sitting on somebody else's stool, and had not hung up his hat.

'This is a dreadful calamity, Mr Copperfield,' said he, as I entered.

'What is?' I exclaimed. 'What's the matter?'

'Don't you know?' cried Tiffey, and all the rest of them, coming round me.

'No!' said I, looking from face to face.

'Mr Spenlow,' said Tiffey.

'What about him!'

'Dead!' I thought it was the office reeling, and not I, as one of the clerks caught hold of me. They sat me down in a chair, untied my neck-cloth, and brought me some water. I have no idea whether this took any time.

'Dead?' said I.

'He dined in town yesterday, and drove down in the phaeton by himself,' said Tiffey, 'having sent his own groom home by the coach, as he sometimes did, you know -'

'Well?'

'The phaeton went home without him. The horses stopped at the stable-gate. The man went out with a lantern. Nobody in the carriage.'

'Had they run away?'

'They were not hot,' said Tiffey, putting on his glasses; 'no hotter, I understand, than they would have been, going down at the usual pace. The reins were broken, but they had been dragging on the ground. The house was roused up directly, and three of them went out along the road. They found him a mile off.'

'More than a mile off, Mr Tiffey,' interposed a junior.

'Was it? I believe you are right,' said Tiffey, - 'more than a mile off - not far from the church - lying partly on the roadside, and partly on the path, upon his face. Whether he fell out in a fit, or got out, feeling ill before the fit came on - or even whether he was quite dead then, though there is no doubt he was quite insensible - no one appears to

know. If he breathed, certainly he never spoke. Medical assistance was got as soon as possible, but it was quite useless.'

I cannot describe the state of mind into which I was thrown by this intelligence. The shock of such an event happening so suddenly, and happening to one with whom I had been in any respect at variance - the appalling vacancy in the room he had occupied so lately, where his chair and table seemed to wait for him, and his handwriting of yesterday was like a ghost - the in- definable impossibility of separating him from the place, and feeling, when the door opened, as if he might come in - the lazy hush and rest there was in the office, and the insatiable relish with which our people talked about it, and other people came in and out all day, and gorged themselves with the subject - this is easily intelligible to anyone. What I cannot describe is, how, in the innermost recesses of my own heart, I had a lurking jealousy even of Death. How I felt as if its might would push me from my ground in Dora's thoughts. How I was, in a grudging way I have no words for, envious of her grief. How it made me restless to think of her weeping to others, or being consoled by others. How I had a grasping, avaricious wish to shut out everybody from her but myself, and to be all in all to her, at that unseasonable time of all times.

In the trouble of this state of mind - not exclusively my own, I hope, but known to others - I went down to Norwood that night; and finding from one of the servants, when I made my inquiries at the door, that Miss Mills was there, got my aunt to direct a letter to her, which I wrote. I deplored the untimely death of Mr Spenlow, most sincerely, and shed tears in doing so. I entreated her to tell Dora, if Dora were in a state to hear it, that he had spoken to me with the utmost kindness and consideration; and had coupled nothing but tenderness, not a single or reproachful word, with her name. I know I did this selfishly, to have my name brought before her; but I tried to believe it was an act of justice to his memory. Perhaps I did believe it.

My aunt received a few lines next day in reply; addressed, outside, to her; within, to me. Dora was overcome by grief; and when her friend had asked her should she send her love to me, had only cried, as she was always crying, 'Oh, dear papa! oh, poor papa!' But she had not said No, and that I made the most of.

Mr Jorkins, who had been at Norwood since the occurrence, came to the office a few days afterwards. He and Tiffey were closeted together for some few moments, and then Tiffey looked out at the door and beckoned me in.

'Oh!' said Mr Jorkins. 'Mr Tiffey and myself, Mr Copperfield, are about to examine the desks, the drawers, and other such repositories of the deceased, with the view of sealing up his private papers, and

searching for a Will. There is no trace of any, elsewhere. It may be as well for you to assist us, if you please.'

I had been in agony to obtain some knowledge of the circumstances in which my Dora would be placed - as, in whose guardianship, and so forth - and this was something towards it. We began the search at once; Mr jorkins unlocking the drawers and desks, and we all taking out the papers. The office-papers we placed on one side, and the private papers (which were not numerous) on the other. We were very grave; and when we came to a stray seal, or pencil-case, or ring, or any little article of that kind which we associated personally with him, we spoke very low.

We had sealed up several packets; and were still going on dustily and quietly, when Mr jorkins said to us, applying exactly the same words to his late partner as his late partner had applied to him:

'Mr Spenlow was very difficult to move from the beaten track. You know what he was! I am disposed to think he had made no will.'

'Oh, I know he had!' said I.

They both stopped and looked at me. 'On the very day when I last saw him,' said I, 'he told me that he had, and that his affairs were long since settled.'

Mr jorkins and old Tiffey shook their heads with one accord.

'That looks unpromising,' said Tiffey.

'Very unpromising,' said Mr jorkins.

'Surely you don't doubt -' I began.

'My good Mr Copperfield!' said Tiffey, laying his hand upon my arm, and shutting up both his eyes as he shook his head: 'if you had been in the Commons as long as I have, you would know that there is no subject on which men are so inconsistent, and so little to be trusted.'

'Why, bless my soul, he made that very remark!' I replied persistently. 'I should call that almost final,' observed Tiffey. 'My opinion is - no will.'

It appeared a wonderful thing to me, but it turned out that there was no will. He had never so much as thought of making one, so far as his papers afforded any evidence; for there was no kind of hint, sketch, or memorandum, of any testamentary intention whatever. What was scarcely less astonishing to me, was, that his affairs were in a most

disordered state. It was extremely difficult, I heard, to make out what he owed, or what he had paid, or of what he died possessed. It was considered likely that for years he could have had no clear opinion on these subjects himself. By little and little it came out, that, in the competition on all points of appearance and gentility then running high in the Commons, he had spent more than his professional income, which was not a very large one, and had reduced his private means, if they ever had been great (which was exceedingly doubtful), to a very low ebb indeed. There was a sale of the furniture and lease, at Norwood; and Tiffey told me, little thinking how interested I was in the story, that, paying all the just debts of the deceased, and deducting his share of outstanding bad and doubtful debts due to the firm, he wouldn't give a thousand pounds for all the assets remaining.

This was at the expiration of about six weeks. I had suffered tortures all the time; and thought I really must have laid violent hands upon myself, when Miss Mills still reported to me, that my broken-hearted little Dora would say nothing, when I was mentioned, but 'Oh, poor papa! Oh, dear papa!' Also, that she had no other relations than two aunts, maiden sisters of Mr Spenlow, who lived at Putney, and who had not held any other than chance communication with their brother for many years. Not that they had ever quarrelled (Miss Mills informed me); but that having been, on the occasion of Dora's christening, invited to tea, when they considered themselves privileged to be invited to dinner, they had expressed their opinion in writing, that it was 'better for the happiness of all parties' that they should stay away. Since which they had gone their road, and their brother had gone his.

These two ladies now emerged from their retirement, and proposed to take Dora to live at Putney. Dora, clinging to them both, and weeping, exclaimed, 'O yes, aunts! Please take Julia Mills and me and Jip to Putney!' So they went, very soon after the funeral.

How I found time to haunt Putney, I am sure I don't know; but I contrived, by some means or other, to prowl about the neighbourhood pretty often. Miss Mills, for the more exact discharge of the duties of friendship, kept a journal; and she used to meet me sometimes, on the Common, and read it, or (if she had not time to do that) lend it to me. How I treasured up the entries, of which I subjoin a sample! -

'Monday. My sweet D. still much depressed. Headache. Called attention to J. as being beautifully sleek. D. fondled J. Associations thus awakened, opened floodgates of sorrow. Rush of grief admitted. (Are tears the dewdrops of the heart? J. M.)

'Tuesday. D. weak and nervous. Beautiful in pallor. (Do we not remark this in moon likewise? J. M.) D., J. M. and J. took airing in carriage. J. looking out of window, and barking violently at dustman,

occasioned smile to overspread features of D. (Of such slight links is chain of life composed! J. M.)

'Wednesday. D. comparatively cheerful. Sang to her, as congenial melody, 'Evening Bells'. Effect not soothing, but reverse. D. inexpressibly affected. Found sobbing afterwards, in own room. Quoted verses respecting self and young Gazelle. Ineffectually. Also referred to Patience on Monument. (Qy. Why on monument? J. M.)

'Thursday. D. certainly improved. Better night. Slight tinge of damask revisiting cheek. Resolved to mention name of D. C. Introduced same, cautiously, in course of airing. D. immediately overcome. 'Oh, dear, dear Julia! Oh, I have been a naughty and undutiful child!' Soothed and caressed. Drew ideal picture of D. C. on verge of tomb. D. again overcome. 'Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do? Oh, take me somewhere!' Much alarmed. Fainting of D. and glass of water from public-house. (Poetical affinity. Chequered sign on door-post; chequered human life. Alas! J. M.)

'Friday. Day of incident. Man appears in kitchen, with blue bag, 'for lady's boots left out to heel'. Cook replies, 'No such orders.' Man argues point. Cook withdraws to inquire, leaving man alone with J. On Cook's return, man still argues point, but ultimately goes. J. missing. D. distracted. Information sent to police. Man to be identified by broad nose, and legs like balustrades of bridge. Search made in every direction. No J. D. weeping bitterly, and inconsolable. Renewed reference to young Gazelle. Appropriate, but unavailing. Towards evening, strange boy calls. Brought into parlour. Broad nose, but no balustrades. Says he wants a pound, and knows a dog. Declines to explain further, though much pressed. Pound being produced by D. takes Cook to little house, where J. alone tied up to leg of table. Joy of D. who dances round J. while he eats his supper. Emboldened by this happy change, mention D. C. upstairs. D. weeps afresh, cries piteously, 'Oh, don't, don't, don't! It is so wicked to think of anything but poor papa!' - embraces J. and sobs herself to sleep. (Must not D. C. confine himself to the broad pinions of Time? J. M.)'

Miss Mills and her journal were my sole consolation at this period. To see her, who had seen Dora but a little while before - to trace the initial letter of Dora's name through her sympathetic pages - to be made more and more miserable by her - were my only comforts. I felt as if I had been living in a palace of cards, which had tumbled down, leaving only Miss Mills and me among the ruins; I felt as if some grim enchanter had drawn a magic circle round the innocent goddess of my heart, which nothing indeed but those same strong pinions, capable of carrying so many people over so much, would enable me to enter!