Chapter XXXIX - Wickfield And Heep

My aunt, beginning, I imagine, to be made seriously uncomfortable by my prolonged dejection, made a pretence of being anxious that I should go to Dover, to see that all was working well at the cottage, which was let; and to conclude an agreement, with the same tenant, for a longer term of occupation. Janet was drafted into the service of Mrs Strong, where I saw her every day. She had been undecided, on leaving Dover, whether or no to give the finishing touch to that renunciation of mankind in which she had been educated, by marrying a pilot; but she decided against that venture. Not so much for the sake of principle, I believe, as because she happened not to like him.

Although it required an effort to leave Miss Mills, I fell rather willingly into my aunt's pretence, as a means of enabling me to pass a few tranquil hours with Agnes. I consulted the good Doctor relative to an absence of three days; and the Doctor wishing me to take that relaxation, - he wished me to take more; but my energy could not bear that, - I made up my mind to go.

As to the Commons, I had no great occasion to be particular about my duties in that quarter. To say the truth, we were getting in no very good odour among the tip-top proctors, and were rapidly sliding down to but a doubtful position. The business had been indifferent under Mr jorkins, before Mr Spenlow's time; and although it had been quickened by the infusion of new blood, and by the display which Mr Spenlow made, still it was not established on a sufficiently strong basis to bear, without being shaken, such a blow as the sudden loss of its active manager. It fell off very much. Mr jorkins, notwithstanding his reputation in the firm, was an easy-going, incapable sort of man, whose reputation out of doors was not calculated to back it up. I was turned over to him now, and when I saw him take his snuff and let the business go, I regretted my aunt's thousand pounds more than ever.

But this was not the worst of it. There were a number of hangers-on and outsiders about the Commons, who, without being proctors themselves, dabbled in common-form business, and got it done by real proctors, who lent their names in consideration of a share in the spoil; - and there were a good many of these too. As our house now wanted business on any terms, we joined this noble band; and threw out lures to the hangers-on and outsiders, to bring their business to us. Marriage licences and small probates were what we all looked for, and what paid us best; and the competition for these ran very high indeed. Kidnappers and inveiglers were planted in all the avenues of entrance to the Commons, with instructions to do their utmost to cut off all persons in mourning, and all gentlemen with anything bashful in their appearance, and entice them to the offices in which their

respective employers were interested; which instructions were so well observed, that I myself, before I was known by sight, was twice hustled into the premises of our principal opponent. The conflicting interests of these touting gentlemen being of a nature to irritate their feelings, personal collisions took place; and the Commons was even scandalized by our principal inveigler (who had formerly been in the wine trade, and afterwards in the sworn brokery line) walking about for some days with a black eye. Any one of these scouts used to think nothing of politely assisting an old lady in black out of a vehicle, killing any proctor whom she inquired for, representing his employer as the lawful successor and representative of that proctor, and bearing the old lady off (sometimes greatly affected) to his employer's office. Many captives were brought to me in this way. As to marriage licences, the competition rose to such a pitch, that a shy gentleman in want of one, had nothing to do but submit himself to the first inveigler, or be fought for, and become the prey of the strongest. One of our clerks, who was an outsider, used, in the height of this contest, to sit with his hat on, that he might be ready to rush out and swear before a surrogate any victim who was brought in. The system of inveigling continues, I believe, to this day. The last time I was in the Commons, a civil able-bodied person in a white apron pounced out upon me from a doorway, and whispering the word 'Marriage-licence' in my ear, was with great difficulty prevented from taking me up in his arms and lifting me into a proctor's. From this digression, let me proceed to Dover.

I found everything in a satisfactory state at the cottage; and was enabled to gratify my aunt exceedingly by reporting that the tenant inherited her feud, and waged incessant war against donkeys. Having settled the little business I had to transact there, and slept there one night, I walked on to Canterbury early in the morning. It was now winter again; and the fresh, cold windy day, and the sweeping downland, brightened up my hopes a little.

Coming into Canterbury, I loitered through the old streets with a sober pleasure that calmed my spirits, and eased my heart. There were the old signs, the old names over the shops, the old people serving in them. It appeared so long, since I had been a schoolboy there, that I wondered the place was so little changed, until I reflected how little I was changed myself. Strange to say, that quiet influence which was inseparable in my mind from Agnes, seemed to pervade even the city where she dwelt. The venerable cathedral towers, and the old jackdaws and rooks whose airy voices made them more retired than perfect silence would have done; the battered gateways, one stuck full with statues, long thrown down, and crumbled away, like the reverential pilgrims who had gazed upon them; the still nooks, where the ivied growth of centuries crept over gabled ends and ruined walls; the ancient houses, the pastoral landscape of field, orchard,

and garden; everywhere - on everything - I felt the same serener air, the same calm, thoughtful, softening spirit.

Arrived at Mr Wickfield's house, I found, in the little lower room on the ground floor, where Uriah Heep had been of old accustomed to sit, Mr Micawber plying his pen with great assiduity. He was dressed in a legal-looking suit of black, and loomed, burly and large, in that small office.

Mr Micawber was extremely glad to see me, but a little confused too. He would have conducted me immediately into the presence of Uriah, but I declined.

'I know the house of old, you recollect,' said I, 'and will find my way upstairs. How do you like the law, Mr Micawber?'

'My dear Copperfield,' he replied. 'To a man possessed of the higher imaginative powers, the objection to legal studies is the amount of detail which they involve. Even in our professional correspondence,' said Mr Micawber, glancing at some letters he was writing, 'the mind is not at liberty to soar to any exalted form of expression. Still, it is a great pursuit. A great pursuit!'

He then told me that he had become the tenant of Uriah Heep's old house; and that Mrs Micawber would be delighted to receive me, once more, under her own roof.

'It is humble,' said Mr Micawber, '- to quote a favourite expression of my friend Heep; but it may prove the stepping-stone to more ambitious domiciliary accommodation.'

I asked him whether he had reason, so far, to be satisfied with his friend Heep's treatment of him? He got up to ascertain if the door were close shut, before he replied, in a lower voice:

'My dear Copperfield, a man who labours under the pressure of pecuniary embarrassments, is, with the generality of people, at a disadvantage. That disadvantage is not diminished, when that pressure necessitates the drawing of stipendiary emoluments, before those emoluments are strictly due and payable. All I can say is, that my friend Heep has responded to appeals to which I need not more particularly refer, in a manner calculated to redound equally to the honour of his head, and of his heart.'

'I should not have supposed him to be very free with his money either,' I observed.

'Pardon me!' said Mr Micawber, with an air of constraint, 'I speak of my friend Heep as I have experience.'

'I am glad your experience is so favourable,' I returned.

'You are very obliging, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr Micawber; and hummed a tune.

'Do you see much of Mr Wickfield?' I asked, to change the subject.

'Not much,' said Mr Micawber, slightingly. 'Mr Wickfield is, I dare say, a man of very excellent intentions; but he is - in short, he is obsolete.'

'I am afraid his partner seeks to make him so,' said I.

'My dear Copperfield!' returned Mr Micawber, after some uneasy evolutions on his stool, 'allow me to offer a remark! I am here, in a capacity of confidence. I am here, in a position of trust. The discussion of some topics, even with Mrs Micawber herself (so long the partner of my various vicissitudes, and a woman of a remarkable lucidity of intellect), is, I am led to consider, incompatible with the functions now devolving on me. I would therefore take the liberty of suggesting that in our friendly intercourse - which I trust will never be disturbed! - we draw a line. On one side of this line,' said Mr Micawber, representing it on the desk with the office ruler, 'is the whole range of the human intellect, with a trifling exception; on the other, IS that exception; that is to say, the affairs of Messrs Wickfield and Heep, with all belonging and appertaining thereunto. I trust I give no offence to the companion of my youth, in submitting this proposition to his cooler judgement?'

Though I saw an uneasy change in Mr Micawber, which sat tightly on him, as if his new duties were a misfit, I felt I had no right to be offended. My telling him so, appeared to relieve him; and he shook hands with me.

'I am charmed, Copperfield,' said Mr Micawber, 'let me assure you, with Miss Wickfield. She is a very superior young lady, of very remarkable attractions, graces, and virtues. Upon my honour,' said Mr Micawber, indefinitely kissing his hand and bowing with his genteelest air, 'I do Homage to Miss Wickfield! Hem!' 'I am glad of that, at least,' said I.

'If you had not assured us, my dear Copperfield, on the occasion of that agreeable afternoon we had the happiness of passing with you, that D. was your favourite letter,' said Mr Micawber, 'I should unquestionably have supposed that A. had been so.'

We have all some experience of a feeling, that comes over us occasionally, of what we are saying and doing having been said and done before, in a remote time - of our having been surrounded, dim ages ago, by the same faces, objects, and circumstances - of our knowing perfectly what will be said next, as if we suddenly remembered it! I never had this mysterious impression more strongly in my life, than before he uttered those words.

I took my leave of Mr Micawber, for the time, charging him with my best remembrances to all at home. As I left him, resuming his stool and his pen, and rolling his head in his stock, to get it into easier writing order, I clearly perceived that there was something interposed between him and me, since he had come into his new functions, which prevented our getting at each other as we used to do, and quite altered the character of our intercourse.

There was no one in the quaint old drawing-room, though it presented tokens of Mrs Heep's whereabouts. I looked into the room still belonging to Agnes, and saw her sitting by the fire, at a pretty old-fashioned desk she had, writing.

My darkening the light made her look up. What a pleasure to be the cause of that bright change in her attentive face, and the object of that sweet regard and welcome!

'Ah, Agnes!' said I, when we were sitting together, side by side; 'I have missed you so much, lately!'

'Indeed?' she replied. 'Again! And so soon?'

I shook my head.

'I don't know how it is, Agnes; I seem to want some faculty of mind that I ought to have. You were so much in the habit of thinking for me, in the happy old days here, and I came so naturally to you for counsel and support, that I really think I have missed acquiring it.'

'And what is it?' said Agnes, cheerfully.

'I don't know what to call it,' I replied. 'I think I am earnest and persevering?'

'I am sure of it,' said Agnes. 'And patient, Agnes?' I inquired, with a little hesitation.

'Yes,' returned Agnes, laughing. 'Pretty well.'

'And yet,' said I, 'I get so miserable and worried, and am so unsteady and irresolute in my power of assuring myself, that I know I must want - shall I call it - reliance, of some kind?'

'Call it so, if you will,' said Agnes.

'Well!' I returned. 'See here! You come to London, I rely on you, and I have an object and a course at once. I am driven out of it, I come here, and in a moment I feel an altered person. The circumstances that distressed me are not changed, since I came into this room; but an influence comes over me in that short interval that alters me, oh, how much for the better! What is it? What is your secret, Agnes?'

Her head was bent down, looking at the fire.

'It's the old story,' said I. 'Don't laugh, when I say it was always the same in little things as it is in greater ones. My old troubles were nonsense, and now they are serious; but whenever I have gone away from my adopted sister -'

Agnes looked up - with such a Heavenly face! - and gave me her hand, which I kissed.

'Whenever I have not had you, Agnes, to advise and approve in the beginning, I have seemed to go wild, and to get into all sorts of difficulty. When I have come to you, at last (as I have always done), I have come to peace and happiness. I come home, now, like a tired traveller, and find such a blessed sense of rest!'

I felt so deeply what I said, it affected me so sincerely, that my voice failed, and I covered my face with my hand, and broke into tears. I write the truth. Whatever contradictions and inconsistencies there were within me, as there are within so many of us; whatever might have been so different, and so much better; whatever I had done, in which I had perversely wandered away from the voice of my own heart; I knew nothing of. I only knew that I was fervently in earnest, when I felt the rest and peace of having Agnes near me.

In her placid sisterly manner; with her beaming eyes; with her tender voice; and with that sweet composure, which had long ago made the house that held her quite a sacred place to me; she soon won me from this weakness, and led me on to tell all that had happened since our last meeting.

'And there is not another word to tell, Agnes,' said I, when I had made an end of my confidence. 'Now, my reliance is on you.'

'But it must not be on me, Trotwood,' returned Agnes, with a pleasant smile. 'It must be on someone else.'

'On Dora?' said I.

'Assuredly.'

'Why, I have not mentioned, Agnes,' said I, a little embarrassed, 'that Dora is rather difficult to - I would not, for the world, say, to rely upon, because she is the soul of purity and truth - but rather difficult to - I hardly know how to express it, really, Agnes. She is a timid little thing, and easily disturbed and frightened. Some time ago, before her father's death, when I thought it right to mention to her - but I'll tell you, if you will bear with me, how it was.'

Accordingly, I told Agnes about my declaration of poverty, about the cookery-book, the housekeeping accounts, and all the rest of it.

'Oh, Trotwood!' she remonstrated, with a smile. 'Just your old headlong way! You might have been in earnest in striving to get on in the world, without being so very sudden with a timid, loving, inexperienced girl. Poor Dora!'

I never heard such sweet forbearing kindness expressed in a voice, as she expressed in making this reply. It was as if I had seen her admiringly and tenderly embracing Dora, and tacitly reproving me, by her considerate protection, for my hot haste in fluttering that little heart. It was as if I had seen Dora, in all her fascinating artlessness, caressing Agnes, and thanking her, and coaxingly appealing against me, and loving me with all her childish innocence.

I felt so grateful to Agnes, and admired her so! I saw those two together, in a bright perspective, such well-associated friends, each adorning the other so much!

'What ought I to do then, Agnes?' I inquired, after looking at the fire a little while. 'What would it be right to do?'

'I think,' said Agnes, 'that the honourable course to take, would be to write to those two ladies. Don't you think that any secret course is an unworthy one?'

'Yes. If YOU think so,' said I.

'I am poorly qualified to judge of such matters,' replied Agnes, with a modest hesitation, 'but I certainly feel - in short, I feel that your being secret and clandestine, is not being like yourself.'

'Like myself, in the too high opinion you have of me, Agnes, I am afraid,' said I.

'Like yourself, in the candour of your nature,' she returned; 'and therefore I would write to those two ladies. I would relate, as plainly and as openly as possible, all that has taken place; and I would ask their permission to visit sometimes, at their house. Considering that you are young, and striving for a place in life, I think it would be well to say that you would readily abide by any conditions they might impose upon you. I would entreat them not to dismiss your request, without a reference to Dora; and to discuss it with her when they should think the time suitable. I would not be too vehement,' said Agnes, gently, 'or propose too much. I would trust to my fidelity and perseverance - and to Dora.'

'But if they were to frighten Dora again, Agnes, by speaking to her,' said I. 'And if Dora were to cry, and say nothing about me!'

'Is that likely?' inquired Agnes, with the same sweet consideration in her face.

'God bless her, she is as easily scared as a bird,' said I. 'It might be! Or if the two Miss Spenlows (elderly ladies of that sort are odd characters sometimes) should not be likely persons to address in that way!'

'I don't think, Trotwood,' returned Agnes, raising her soft eyes to mine, 'I would consider that. Perhaps it would be better only to consider whether it is right to do this; and, if it is, to do it.'

I had no longer any doubt on the subject. With a lightened heart, though with a profound sense of the weighty importance of my task, I devoted the whole afternoon to the composition of the draft of this letter; for which great purpose, Agnes relinquished her desk to me. But first I went downstairs to see Mr Wickfield and Uriah Heep.

I found Uriah in possession of a new, plaster-smelling office, built out in the garden; looking extraordinarily mean, in the midst of a quantity of books and papers. He received me in his usual fawning way, and pretended not to have heard of my arrival from Mr Micawber; a pretence I took the liberty of disbelieving. He accompanied me into Mr Wickfield's room, which was the shadow of its former self - having been divested of a variety of conveniences, for the accommodation of the new partner - and stood before the fire, warming his back, and shaving his chin with his bony hand, while Mr Wickfield and I exchanged greetings.

'You stay with us, Trotwood, while you remain in Canterbury?' said Mr Wickfield, not without a glance at Uriah for his approval.

'Is there room for me?' said I.

'I am sure, Master Copperfield - I should say Mister, but the other comes so natural,' said Uriah, -'I would turn out of your old room with pleasure, if it would be agreeable.'

'No, no,' said Mr Wickfield. 'Why should you be inconvenienced? There's another room. There's another room.' 'Oh, but you know,' returned Uriah, with a grin, 'I should really be delighted!'

To cut the matter short, I said I would have the other room or none at all; so it was settled that I should have the other room; and, taking my leave of the firm until dinner, I went upstairs again.

I had hoped to have no other companion than Agnes. But Mrs Heep had asked permission to bring herself and her knitting near the fire, in that room; on pretence of its having an aspect more favourable for her rheumatics, as the wind then was, than the drawing-room or dining-parlour. Though I could almost have consigned her to the mercies of the wind on the topmost pinnacle of the Cathedral, without remorse, I made a virtue of necessity, and gave her a friendly salutation.

'I'm umbly thankful to you, sir,' said Mrs Heep, in acknowledgement of my inquiries concerning her health, 'but I'm only pretty well. I haven't much to boast of. If I could see my Uriah well settled in life, I couldn't expect much more I think. How do you think my Ury looking, sir?'

I thought him looking as villainous as ever, and I replied that I saw no change in him.

'Oh, don't you think he's changed?' said Mrs Heep. 'There I must umbly beg leave to differ from you. Don't you see a thinness in him?'

'Not more than usual,' I replied.

'Don't you though!' said Mrs Heep. 'But you don't take notice of him with a mother's eye!'

His mother's eye was an evil eye to the rest of the world, I thought as it met mine, howsoever affectionate to him; and I believe she and her son were devoted to one another. It passed me, and went on to Agnes.

'Don't YOU see a wasting and a wearing in him, Miss Wickfield?' inquired Mrs Heep.

'No,' said Agnes, quietly pursuing the work on which she was engaged. 'You are too solicitous about him. He is very well.'

Mrs Heep, with a prodigious sniff, resumed her knitting.

She never left off, or left us for a moment. I had arrived early in the day, and we had still three or four hours before dinner; but she sat there, plying her knitting-needles as monotonously as an hour-glass might have poured out its sands. She sat on one side of the fire; I sat at the desk in front of it; a little beyond me, on the other side, sat Agnes. Whensoever, slowly pondering over my letter, I lifted up my eyes, and meeting the thoughtful face of Agnes, saw it clear, and beam encouragement upon me, with its own angelic expression, I was conscious presently of the evil eye passing me, and going on to her, and coming back to me again, and dropping furtively upon the knitting. What the knitting was, I don't know, not being learned in that art; but it looked like a net; and as she worked away with those Chinese chopsticks of knitting-needles, she showed in the firelight like an ill-looking enchantress, baulked as yet by the radiant goodness opposite, but getting ready for a cast of her net by and by.

At dinner she maintained her watch, with the same unwinking eyes. After dinner, her son took his turn; and when Mr Wickfield, himself, and I were left alone together, leered at me, and writhed until I could hardly bear it. In the drawing-room, there was the mother knitting and watching again. All the time that Agnes sang and played, the mother sat at the piano. Once she asked for a particular ballad, which she said her Ury (who was yawning in a great chair) doted on; and at intervals she looked round at him, and reported to Agnes that he was in raptures with the music. But she hardly ever spoke - I question if she ever did - without making some mention of him. It was evident to me that this was the duty assigned to her.

This lasted until bedtime. To have seen the mother and son, like two great bats hanging over the whole house, and darkening it with their ugly forms, made me so uncomfortable, that I would rather have remained downstairs, knitting and all, than gone to bed. I hardly got any sleep. Next day the knitting and watching began again, and lasted all day.

I had not an opportunity of speaking to Agnes, for ten minutes. I could barely show her my letter. I proposed to her to walk out with me; but Mrs Heep repeatedly complaining that she was worse, Agnes charitably remained within, to bear her company. Towards the twilight I went out by myself, musing on what I ought to do, and whether I was justified in withholding from Agnes, any longer, what Uriah Heep had told me in London; for that began to trouble me again, very much.

I had not walked out far enough to be quite clear of the town, upon the Ramsgate road, where there was a good path, when I was hailed, through the dust, by somebody behind me. The shambling figure, and the scanty great-coat, were not to be mistaken. I stopped, and Uriah Heep came up.

'Well?' said I.

'How fast you walk!' said he. 'My legs are pretty long, but you've given 'em quite a job.'

'Where are you going?' said I.

'I am going with you, Master Copperfield, if you'll allow me the pleasure of a walk with an old acquaintance.' Saying this, with a jerk of his body, which might have been either propitiatory or derisive, he fell into step beside me.

'Uriah!' said I, as civilly as I could, after a silence.

'Master Copperfield!' said Uriah.

'To tell you the truth (at which you will not be offended), I came Out to walk alone, because I have had so much company.'

He looked at me sideways, and said with his hardest grin, 'You mean mother.'

'Why yes, I do,' said I.

'Ah! But you know we're so very umble,' he returned. 'And having such a knowledge of our own umbleness, we must really take care that we're not pushed to the wall by them as isn't umble. All stratagems are fair in love, sir.'

Raising his great hands until they touched his chin, he rubbed them softly, and softly chuckled; looking as like a malevolent baboon, I thought, as anything human could look.

'You see,' he said, still hugging himself in that unpleasant way, and shaking his head at me, 'you're quite a dangerous rival, Master Copperfield. You always was, you know.'

'Do you set a watch upon Miss Wickfield, and make her home no home, because of me?' said I.

'Oh! Master Copperfield! Those are very arsh words,' he replied.

'Put my meaning into any words you like,' said I. 'You know what it is, Uriah, as well as I do.'

'Oh no! You must put it into words,' he said. 'Oh, really! I couldn't myself.'

'Do you suppose,' said I, constraining myself to be very temperate and quiet with him, on account of Agnes, 'that I regard Miss Wickfield otherwise than as a very dear sister?'

'Well, Master Copperfield,' he replied, 'you perceive I am not bound to answer that question. You may not, you know. But then, you see, you may!'

Anything to equal the low cunning of his visage, and of his shadowless eyes without the ghost of an eyelash, I never saw.

'Come then!' said I. 'For the sake of Miss Wickfield -'

'My Agnes!' he exclaimed, with a sickly, angular contortion of himself. 'Would you be so good as call her Agnes, Master Copperfield!'

'For the sake of Agnes Wickfield - Heaven bless her!'

'Thank you for that blessing, Master Copperfield!'he interposed.

'I will tell you what I should, under any other circumstances, as soon have thought of telling to - Jack Ketch.'

'To who, sir?' said Uriah, stretching out his neck, and shading his ear with his hand.

'To the hangman,' I returned. 'The most unlikely person I could think of,' - though his own face had suggested the allusion quite as a natural sequence. 'I am engaged to another young lady. I hope that contents you.'

'Upon your soul?' said Uriah.

I was about indignantly to give my assertion the confirmation he required, when he caught hold of my hand, and gave it a squeeze.

'Oh, Master Copperfield!' he said. 'If you had only had the condescension to return my confidence when I poured out the fulness of my art, the night I put you so much out of the way by sleeping before your sitting-room fire, I never should have doubted you. As it is, I'm sure I'll take off mother directly, and only too appy. I know you'll excuse the precautions of affection, won't you? What a pity,

Master Copperfield, that you didn't condescend to return my confidence! I'm sure I gave you every opportunity. But you never have condescended to me, as much as I could have wished. I know you have never liked me, as I have liked you!'

All this time he was squeezing my hand with his damp fishy fingers, while I made every effort I decently could to get it away. But I was quite unsuccessful. He drew it under the sleeve of his mulberry-coloured great-coat, and I walked on, almost upon compulsion, arm-in-arm with him.

'Shall we turn?' said Uriah, by and by wheeling me face about towards the town, on which the early moon was now shining, silvering the distant windows.

'Before we leave the subject, you ought to understand,' said I, breaking a pretty long silence, 'that I believe Agnes Wickfield to be as far above you, and as far removed from all your aspirations, as that moon herself!'

'Peaceful! Ain't she!' said Uriah. 'Very! Now confess, Master Copperfield, that you haven't liked me quite as I have liked you. All along you've thought me too umble now, I shouldn't wonder?'

'I am not fond of professions of humility,' I returned, 'or professions of anything else.' 'There now!' said Uriah, looking flabby and lead-coloured in the moonlight. 'Didn't I know it! But how little you think of the rightful umbleness of a person in my station, Master Copperfield! Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness - not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters! Father got the monitor-medal by being umble. So did I. Father got made a sexton by being umble. He had the character, among the gentlefolks, of being such a well-behaved man, that they were determined to bring him in. 'Be umble, Uriah,' says father to me, 'and you'll get on. It was what was always being dinned into you and me at school; it's what goes down best. Be umble,' says father, 'and you'll do!' And really it ain't done bad!'

It was the first time it had ever occurred to me, that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family. I had seen the harvest, but had never thought of the seed.

'When I was quite a young boy,' said Uriah, 'I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, 'Hold hard!' When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. 'People like to be above you,' says father, 'keep yourself down.' I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power!'

And he said all this - I knew, as I saw his face in the moonlight - that I might understand he was resolved to recompense himself by using his power. I had never doubted his meanness, his craft and malice; but I fully comprehended now, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit, must have been engendered by this early, and this long, suppression.

His account of himself was so far attended with an agreeable result, that it led to his withdrawing his hand in order that he might have another hug of himself under the chin. Once apart from him, I was determined to keep apart; and we walked back, side by side, saying very little more by the way. Whether his spirits were elevated by the communication I had made to him, or by his having indulged in this retrospect, I don't know; but they were raised by some influence. He talked more at dinner than was usual with him; asked his mother (off duty, from the moment of our re-entering the house) whether he was not growing too old for a bachelor; and once looked at Agnes so, that I would have given all I had, for leave to knock him down.

When we three males were left alone after dinner, he got into a more adventurous state. He had taken little or no wine; and I presume it was the mere insolence of triumph that was upon him, flushed perhaps by the temptation my presence furnished to its exhibition.

I had observed yesterday, that he tried to entice Mr Wickfield to drink; and, interpreting the look which Agnes had given me as she went out, had limited myself to one glass, and then proposed that we should follow her. I would have done so again today; but Uriah was too quick for me.

'We seldom see our present visitor, sir,' he said, addressing Mr Wickfield, sitting, such a contrast to him, at the end of the table, 'and I should propose to give him welcome in another glass or two of wine, if you have no objections. Mr Copperfield, your elth and appiness!'

I was obliged to make a show of taking the hand he stretched across to me; and then, with very different emotions, I took the hand of the broken gentleman, his partner.

'Come, fellow-partner,' said Uriah, 'if I may take the liberty, - now, suppose you give us something or another appropriate to Copperfield!'

I pass over Mr Wickfield's proposing my aunt, his proposing Mr Dick, his proposing Doctors' Commons, his proposing Uriah, his drinking everything twice; his consciousness of his own weakness, the ineffectual effort that he made against it; the struggle between his shame in Uriah's deportment, and his desire to conciliate him; the manifest exultation with which Uriah twisted and turned, and held him up before me. It made me sick at heart to see, and my hand recoils from writing it.

'Come, fellow-partner!' said Uriah, at last, 'I'll give you another one, and I umbly ask for bumpers, seeing I intend to make it the divinest of her sex.'

Her father had his empty glass in his hand. I saw him set it down, look at the picture she was so like, put his hand to his forehead, and shrink back in his elbow-chair.

'I'm an umble individual to give you her elth,' proceeded Uriah, 'but I admire - adore her.'

No physical pain that her father's grey head could have borne, I think, could have been more terrible to me, than the mental endurance I saw compressed now within both his hands.

'Agnes,' said Uriah, either not regarding him, or not knowing what the nature of his action was, 'Agnes Wickfield is, I am safe to say, the divinest of her sex. May I speak out, among friends? To be her father is a proud distinction, but to be her usband -'

Spare me from ever again hearing such a cry, as that with which her father rose up from the table! 'What's the matter?' said Uriah, turning of a deadly colour. 'You are not gone mad, after all, Mr Wickfield, I hope? If I say I've an ambition to make your Agnes my Agnes, I have as good a right to it as another man. I have a better right to it than any other man!'

I had my arms round Mr Wickfield, imploring him by everything that I could think of, oftenest of all by his love for Agnes, to calm himself a little. He was mad for the moment; tearing out his hair, beating his head, trying to force me from him, and to force himself from me, not answering a word, not looking at or seeing anyone; blindly striving for he knew not what, his face all staring and distorted - a frightful spectacle.

I conjured him, incoherently, but in the most impassioned manner, not to abandon himself to this wildness, but to hear me. I besought him to think of Agnes, to connect me with Agnes, to recollect how Agnes and I had grown up together, how I honoured her and loved

her, how she was his pride and joy. I tried to bring her idea before him in any form; I even reproached him with not having firmness to spare her the knowledge of such a scene as this. I may have effected something, or his wildness may have spent itself; but by degrees he struggled less, and began to look at me - strangely at first, then with recognition in his eyes. At length he said, 'I know, Trotwood! My darling child and you - I know! But look at him!'

He pointed to Uriah, pale and glowering in a corner, evidently very much out in his calculations, and taken by surprise.

'Look at my torturer,' he replied. 'Before him I have step by step abandoned name and reputation, peace and quiet, house and home.'

'I have kept your name and reputation for you, and your peace and quiet, and your house and home too,' said Uriah, with a sulky, hurried, defeated air of compromise. 'Don't be foolish, Mr Wickfield. If I have gone a little beyond what you were prepared for, I can go back, I suppose? There's no harm done.'

'I looked for single motives in everyone,' said Mr Wickfield, and I was satisfied I had bound him to me by motives of interest. But see what he is - oh, see what he is!'

'You had better stop him, Copperfield, if you can,' cried Uriah, with his long forefinger pointing towards me. 'He'll say something presently - mind you! - he'll be sorry to have said afterwards, and you'll be sorry to have heard!'

'I'll say anything!' cried Mr Wickfield, with a desperate air. 'Why should I not be in all the world's power if I am in yours?'

'Mind! I tell you!' said Uriah, continuing to warn me. 'If you don't stop his mouth, you're not his friend! Why shouldn't you be in all the world's power, Mr Wickfield? Because you have got a daughter. You and me know what we know, don't we? Let sleeping dogs lie - who wants to rouse 'em? I don't. Can't you see I am as umble as I can be? I tell you, if I've gone too far, I'm sorry. What would you have, sir?'

'Oh, Trotwood, Trotwood!'exclaimed Mr Wickfield, wringing his hands. 'What I have come down to be, since I first saw you in this house! I was on my downward way then, but the dreary, dreary road I have traversed since! Weak indulgence has ruined me. Indulgence in remembrance, and indulgence in forgetfulness. My natural grief for my child's mother turned to disease; my natural love for my child turned to disease. I have infected everything I touched. I have brought misery on what I dearly love, I know -you know! I thought it possible that I could truly love one creature in the world, and not love the rest;

I thought it possible that I could truly mourn for one creature gone out of the world, and not have some part in the grief of all who mourned. Thus the lessons of my life have been perverted! I have preyed on my own morbid coward heart, and it has preyed on me. Sordid in my grief, sordid in my love, sordid in my miserable escape from the darker side of both, oh see the ruin I am, and hate me, shun me!'

He dropped into a chair, and weakly sobbed. The excitement into which he had been roused was leaving him. Uriah came out of his corner.

'I don't know all I have done, in my fatuity,' said Mr Wickfield, putting out his hands, as if to deprecate my condemnation. 'He knows best,' meaning Uriah Heep, 'for he has always been at my elbow, whispering me. You see the millstone that he is about my neck. You find him in my house, you find him in my business. You heard him, but a little time ago. What need have I to say more!'

'You haven't need to say so much, nor half so much, nor anything at all,' observed Uriah, half defiant, and half fawning. 'You wouldn't have took it up so, if it hadn't been for the wine. You'll think better of it tomorrow, sir. If I have said too much, or more than I meant, what of it? I haven't stood by it!'

The door opened, and Agnes, gliding in, without a vestige of colour in her face, put her arm round his neck, and steadily said, 'Papa, you are not well. Come with me!'

He laid his head upon her shoulder, as if he were oppressed with heavy shame, and went out with her. Her eyes met mine for but an instant, yet I saw how much she knew of what had passed.

'I didn't expect he'd cut up so rough, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'But it's nothing. I'll be friends with him tomorrow. It's for his good. I'm umbly anxious for his good.'

I gave him no answer, and went upstairs into the quiet room where Agnes had so often sat beside me at my books. Nobody came near me until late at night. I took up a book, and tried to read. I heard the clocks strike twelve, and was still reading, without knowing what I read, when Agnes touched me.

'You will be going early in the morning, Trotwood! Let us say good-bye, now!'

She had been weeping, but her face then was so calm and beautiful!

'Heaven bless you!' she said, giving me her hand.

'Dearest Agnes!' I returned, 'I see you ask me not to speak of tonight - but is there nothing to be done?'

'There is God to trust in!' she replied.

'Can I do nothing- I, who come to you with my poor sorrows?'

'And make mine so much lighter,' she replied. 'Dear Trotwood, no!'

'Dear Agnes,' I said, 'it is presumptuous for me, who am so poor in all in which you are so rich - goodness, resolution, all noble qualities - to doubt or direct you; but you know how much I love you, and how much I owe you. You will never sacrifice yourself to a mistaken sense of duty, Agnes?'

More agitated for a moment than I had ever seen her, she took her hands from me, and moved a step back.

'Say you have no such thought, dear Agnes! Much more than sister! Think of the priceless gift of such a heart as yours, of such a love as yours!'

Oh! long, long afterwards, I saw that face rise up before me, with its momentary look, not wondering, not accusing, not regretting. Oh, long, long afterwards, I saw that look subside, as it did now, into the lovely smile, with which she told me she had no fear for herself - I need have none for her - and parted from me by the name of Brother, and was gone!

It was dark in the morning, when I got upon the coach at the inn door. The day was just breaking when we were about to start, and then, as I sat thinking of her, came struggling up the coach side, through the mingled day and night, Uriah's head.

'Copperfield!' said he, in a croaking whisper, as he hung by the iron on the roof, 'I thought you'd be glad to hear before you went off, that there are no squares broke between us. I've been into his room already, and we've made it all smooth. Why, though I'm umble, I'm useful to him, you know; and he understands his interest when he isn't in liquor! What an agreeable man he is, after all, Master Copperfield!'

I obliged myself to say that I was glad he had made his apology.

'Oh, to be sure!' said Uriah. 'When a person's umble, you know, what's an apology? So easy! I say! I suppose,' with a jerk, 'you have sometimes plucked a pear before it was ripe, Master Copperfield?'

'I suppose I have,' I replied.

'I did that last night,' said Uriah; 'but it'll ripen yet! It only wants attending to. I can wait!'

Profuse in his farewells, he got down again as the coachman got up. For anything I know, he was eating something to keep the raw morning air out; but he made motions with his mouth as if the pear were ripe already, and he were smacking his lips over it.