

Chapter IV - Mrs Flintwinch Has A Dream

When Mrs Flintwinch dreamed, she usually dreamed, unlike the son of her old mistress, with her eyes shut. She had a curiously vivid dream that night, and before she had left the son of her old mistress many hours. In fact it was not at all like a dream; it was so very real in every respect. It happened in this wise.

The bed-chamber occupied by Mr and Mrs Flintwinch was within a few paces of that to which Mrs Clennam had been so long confined. It was not on the same floor, for it was a room at the side of the house, which was approached by a steep descent of a few odd steps, diverging from the main staircase nearly opposite to Mrs Clennam's door. It could scarcely be said to be within call, the walls, doors, and panelling of the old place were so cumbrous; but it was within easy reach, in any undress, at any hour of the night, in any temperature. At the head of the bed and within a foot of Mrs Flintwinch's ear, was a bell, the line of which hung ready to Mrs Clennam's hand. Whenever this bell rang, up started Affery, and was in the sick room before she was awake.

Having got her mistress into bed, lighted her lamp, and given her good night, Mrs Flintwinch went to roost as usual, saving that her lord had not yet appeared. It was her lord himself who became - unlike the last theme in the mind, according to the observation of most philosophers - the subject of Mrs Flintwinch's dream. It seemed to her that she awoke after sleeping some hours, and found Jeremiah not yet abed. That she looked at the candle she had left burning, and, measuring the time like King Alfred the Great, was confirmed by its wasted state in her belief that she had been asleep for some considerable period. That she arose thereupon, muffled herself up in a wrapper, put on her shoes, and went out on the staircase, much surprised, to look for Jeremiah.

The staircase was as wooden and solid as need be, and Affery went straight down it without any of those deviations peculiar to dreams. She did not skim over it, but walked down it, and guided herself by the banisters on account of her candle having died out. In one corner of the hall, behind the house-door, there was a little waiting-room, like a well-shaft, with a long narrow window in it as if it had been ripped up. In this room, which was never used, a light was burning.

Mrs Flintwinch crossed the hall, feeling its pavement cold to her stockingless feet, and peeped in between the rusty hinges on the door, which stood a little open. She expected to see Jeremiah fast asleep or in a fit, but he was calmly seated in a chair, awake, and in his usual health. But what - hey? - Lord forgive us! - Mrs Flintwinch muttered some ejaculation to this effect, and turned giddy.

For, Mr Flintwinch awake, was watching Mr Flintwinch asleep. He sat on one side of the small table, looking keenly at himself on the other side with his chin sunk on his breast, snoring. The waking Flintwinch had his full front face presented to his wife; the sleeping Flintwinch was in profile. The waking Flintwinch was the old original; the sleeping Flintwinch was the double. just as she might have distinguished between a tangible object and its reflection in a glass, Affery made out this difference with her head going round and round.

If she had had any doubt which was her own Jeremiah, it would have been resolved by his impatience. He looked about him for an offensive weapon, caught up the snuffers, and, before applying them to the cabbage-headed candle, lunged at the sleeper as though he would have run him through the body.

'Who's that? What's the matter?' cried the sleeper, starting.

Mr Flintwinch made a movement with the snuffers, as if he would have enforced silence on his companion by putting them down his throat; the companion, coming to himself, said, rubbing his eyes, 'I forgot where I was.'

'You have been asleep,' snarled Jeremiah, referring to his watch, 'two hours. You said you would be rested enough if you had a short nap.'

'I have had a short nap,' said Double.

'Half-past two o'clock in the morning,' muttered Jeremiah. 'Where's your hat? Where's your coat? Where's the box?'

'All here,' said Double, tying up his throat with sleepy carefulness in a shawl. 'Stop a minute. Now give me the sleeve - not that sleeve, the other one. Ha! I'm not as young as I was.' Mr Flintwinch had pulled him into his coat with vehement energy. 'You promised me a second glass after I was rested.' 'Drink it!' returned Jeremiah, 'and - choke yourself, I was going to say - but go, I mean.' At the same time he produced the identical port-wine bottle, and filled a wine-glass.

'Her port-wine, I believe?' said Double, tasting it as if he were in the Docks, with hours to spare. 'Her health.'

He took a sip.

'Your health!'

He took another sip.

'His health!'

He took another sip.

'And all friends round St Paul's.' He emptied and put down the wine-glass half-way through this ancient civic toast, and took up the box. It was an iron box some two feet square, which he carried under his arms pretty easily. Jeremiah watched his manner of adjusting it, with jealous eyes; tried it with his hands, to be sure that he had a firm hold of it; bade him for his life be careful what he was about; and then stole out on tiptoe to open the door for him. Affery, anticipating the last movement, was on the staircase. The sequence of things was so ordinary and natural, that, standing there, she could hear the door open, feel the night air, and see the stars outside.

But now came the most remarkable part of the dream. She felt so afraid of her husband, that being on the staircase, she had not the power to retreat to her room (which she might easily have done before he had fastened the door), but stood there staring. Consequently when he came up the staircase to bed, candle in hand, he came full upon her. He looked astonished, but said not a word. He kept his eyes upon her, and kept advancing; and she, completely under his influence, kept retiring before him. Thus, she walking backward and he walking forward, they came into their own room. They were no sooner shut in there, than Mr Flintwinch took her by the throat, and shook her until she was black in the face.

'Why, Affery, woman - Affery!' said Mr Flintwinch. 'What have you been dreaming of? Wake up, wake up! What's the matter?'

'The - the matter, Jeremiah?' gasped Mrs Flintwinch, rolling her eyes.

'Why, Affery, woman - Affery! You have been getting out of bed in your sleep, my dear! I come up, after having fallen asleep myself, below, and find you in your wrapper here, with the nightmare. Affery, woman,' said Mr Flintwinch, with a friendly grin on his expressive countenance, 'if you ever have a dream of this sort again, it'll be a sign of your being in want of physic. And I'll give you such a dose, old woman - such a dose!'

Mrs Flintwinch thanked him and crept into bed.