

Chapter XXX - The Word Of A Gentleman

When Mr and Mrs Flintwinch panted up to the door of the old house in the twilight, Jeremiah within a second of Affery, the stranger started back. 'Death of my soul!' he exclaimed. 'Why, how did you get here?'

Mr Flintwinch, to whom these words were spoken, repaid the stranger's wonder in full. He gazed at him with blank astonishment; he looked over his own shoulder, as expecting to see some one he had not been aware of standing behind him; he gazed at the stranger again, speechlessly, at a loss to know what he meant; he looked to his wife for explanation; receiving none, he pounced upon her, and shook her with such heartiness that he shook her cap off her head, saying between his teeth, with grim raillery, as he did it, 'Affery, my woman, you must have a dose, my woman! This is some of your tricks! You have been dreaming again, mistress. What's it about? Who is it? What does it mean! Speak out or be choked! It's the only choice I'll give you.'

Supposing Mistress Affery to have any power of election at the moment, her choice was decidedly to be choked; for she answered not a syllable to this adjuration, but, with her bare head wagging violently backwards and forwards, resigned herself to her punishment. The stranger, however, picking up her cap with an air of gallantry, interposed.

'Permit me,' said he, laying his hand on the shoulder of Jeremiah, who stopped and released his victim. 'Thank you. Excuse me. Husband and wife I know, from this playfulness. Haha! Always agreeable to see that relation playfully maintained. Listen! May I suggest that somebody up-stairs, in the dark, is becoming energetically curious to know what is going on here?'

This reference to Mrs Clennam's voice reminded Mr Flintwinch to step into the hall and call up the staircase. 'It's all right, I am here, Affery is coming with your light.' Then he said to the latter flustered woman, who was putting her cap on, 'Get out with you, and get up-stairs!' and then turned to the stranger and said to him, 'Now, sir, what might you please to want?'

'I am afraid,' said the stranger, 'I must be so troublesome as to propose a candle.'

'True,' assented Jeremiah. 'I was going to do so. Please to stand where you are while I get one.'

The visitor was standing in the doorway, but turned a little into the gloom of the house as Mr Flintwinch turned, and pursued him with

his eyes into the little room, where he groped about for a phosphorus box. When he found it, it was damp, or otherwise out of order; and match after match that he struck into it lighted sufficiently to throw a dull glare about his groping face, and to sprinkle his hands with pale little spots of fire, but not sufficiently to light the candle. The stranger, taking advantage of this fitful illumination of his visage, looked intently and wonderingly at him. Jeremiah, when he at last lighted the candle, knew he had been doing this, by seeing the last shade of a lowering watchfulness clear away from his face, as it broke into the doubtful smile that was a large ingredient in its expression.

'Be so good,' said Jeremiah, closing the house door, and taking a pretty sharp survey of the smiling visitor in his turn, 'as to step into my counting-house. - It's all right, I tell you!' petulantly breaking off to answer the voice up-stairs, still unsatisfied, though Affery was there, speaking in persuasive tones. 'Don't I tell you it's all right? Preserve the woman, has she no reason at all in her!'

'Timorous,' remarked the stranger.

'Timorous?' said Mr Flintwinch, turning his head to retort, as he went before with the candle. 'More courageous than ninety men in a hundred, sir, let me tell you.'

'Though an invalid?'

'Many years an invalid. Mrs Clennam. The only one of that name left in the House now. My partner.' Saying something apologetically as he crossed the hall, to the effect that at that time of night they were not in the habit of receiving any one, and were always shut up, Mr Flintwinch led the way into his own office, which presented a sufficiently business-like appearance. Here he put the light on his desk, and said to the stranger, with his wryest twist upon him, 'Your commands.'

'MY name is Blandois.'

'Blandois. I don't know it,' said Jeremiah.

'I thought it possible,' resumed the other, 'that you might have been advised from Paris - '

'We have had no advice from Paris respecting anybody of the name of Blandois,' said Jeremiah.

'No?'

'No.'

Jeremiah stood in his favourite attitude. The smiling Mr Blandois, opening his cloak to get his hand to a breast-pocket, paused to say, with a laugh in his glittering eyes, which it occurred to Mr Flintwinch were too near together:

'You are so like a friend of mine! Not so identically the same as I supposed when I really did for the moment take you to be the same in the dusk - for which I ought to apologise; permit me to do so; a readiness to confess my errors is, I hope, a part of the frankness of my character - still, however, uncommonly like.'

'Indeed?' said Jeremiah, perversely. 'But I have not received any letter of advice from anywhere respecting anybody of the name of Blandois.'

'Just so,' said the stranger. 'JUST so,' said Jeremiah.

Mr Blandois, not at all put out by this omission on the part of the correspondents of the house of Clennam and Co., took his pocket-book from his breast-pocket, selected a letter from that receptacle, and handed it to Mr Flintwinch. 'No doubt you are well acquainted with the writing. Perhaps the letter speaks for itself, and requires no advice. You are a far more competent judge of such affairs than I am. It is my misfortune to be, not so much a man of business, as what the world calls (arbitrarily) a gentleman.'

Mr Flintwinch took the letter, and read, under date of Paris, 'We have to present to you, on behalf of a highly esteemed correspondent of our Firm, M. Blandois, of this city,' &c. &c. 'Such facilities as he may require and such attentions as may lie in your power,' &c. &c. 'Also have to add that if you will honour M. Blandois' drafts at sight to the extent of, say Fifty Pounds sterling (150),' &c. &c.

'Very good, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch. 'Take a chair. To the extent of anything that our House can do - we are in a retired, old-fashioned, steady way of business, sir - we shall be happy to render you our best assistance. I observe, from the date of this, that we could not yet be advised of it. Probably you came over with the delayed mail that brings the advice.'

'That I came over with the delayed mail, sir,' returned Mr Blandois, passing his white hand down his high-hooked nose, 'I know to the cost of my head and stomach: the detestable and intolerable weather having racked them both. You see me in the plight in which I came out of the packet within this half-hour. I ought to have been here hours ago, and then I should not have to apologise - permit me to apologise - for presenting myself so unreasonably, and frightening - no, by-the-bye, you said not frightening; permit me to apologise again

- the esteemed lady, Mrs Clennam, in her invalid chamber above stairs.'

Swagger and an air of authorised condescension do so much, that Mr Flintwinch had already begun to think this a highly gentlemanly personage. Not the less unyielding with him on that account, he scraped his chin and said, what could he have the honour of doing for Mr Blandois to-night, out of business hours?

'Faith!' returned that gentleman, shrugging his cloaked shoulders, 'I must change, and eat and drink, and be lodged somewhere. Have the kindness to advise me, a total stranger, where, and money is a matter of perfect indifference until to-morrow. The nearer the place, the better. Next door, if that's all.'

Mr Flintwinch was slowly beginning, 'For a gentleman of your habits, there is not in this immediate neighbourhood any hotel - ' when Mr Blandois took him up.

'So much for my habits! my dear sir,' snapping his fingers. 'A citizen of the world has no habits. That I am, in my poor way, a gentleman, by Heaven! I will not deny, but I have no unaccommodating prejudiced habits. A clean room, a hot dish for dinner, and a bottle of not absolutely poisonous wine, are all I want tonight. But I want that much without the trouble of going one unnecessary inch to get it.'

'There is,' said Mr Flintwinch, with more than his usual deliberation, as he met, for a moment, Mr Blandois' shining eyes, which were restless; 'there is a coffee-house and tavern close here, which, so far, I can recommend; but there's no style about it.'

'I dispense with style!' said Mr Blandois, waving his hand. 'Do me the honour to show me the house, and introduce me there (if I am not too troublesome), and I shall be infinitely obliged.' Mr Flintwinch, upon this, looked up his hat, and lighted Mr Blandois across the hall again. As he put the candle on a bracket, where the dark old panelling almost served as an extinguisher for it, he bethought himself of going up to tell the invalid that he would not be absent five minutes. 'Oblige me,' said the visitor, on his saying so, 'by presenting my card of visit. Do me the favour to add that I shall be happy to wait on Mrs Clennam, to offer my personal compliments, and to apologise for having occasioned any agitation in this tranquil corner, if it should suit her convenience to endure the presence of a stranger for a few minutes, after he shall have changed his wet clothes and fortified himself with something to eat and drink.'

Jeremiah made all despatch, and said, on his return, 'She'll be glad to see you, sir; but, being conscious that her sick room has no

attractions, wishes me to say that she won't hold you to your offer, in case you should think better of it.'

'To think better of it,' returned the gallant Blandois, 'would be to slight a lady; to slight a lady would be to be deficient in chivalry towards the sex; and chivalry towards the sex is a part of my character!' Thus expressing himself, he threw the draggled skirt of his cloak over his shoulder, and accompanied Mr Flintwinch to the tavern; taking up on the road a porter who was waiting with his portmanteau on the outer side of the gateway.

The house was kept in a homely manner, and the condescension of Mr Blandois was infinite. It seemed to fill to inconvenience the little bar in which the widow landlady and her two daughters received him; it was much too big for the narrow wainscoted room with a bagatelle-board in it, that was first proposed for his reception; it perfectly swamped the little private holiday sitting-room of the family, which was finally given up to him. Here, in dry clothes and scented linen, with sleeked hair, a great ring on each forefinger and a massive show of watch-chain, Mr Blandois waiting for his dinner, lolling on a window-seat with his knees drawn up, looked (for all the difference in the setting of the jewel) fearfully and wonderfully like a certain Monsieur Rigaud who had once so waited for his breakfast, lying on the stone ledge of the iron grating of a cell in a villainous dungeon at Marseilles.

His greed at dinner, too, was closely in keeping with the greed of Monsieur Rigaud at breakfast. His avaricious manner of collecting all the eatables about him, and devouring some with his eyes while devouring others with his jaws, was the same manner. His utter disregard of other people, as shown in his way of tossing the little womanly toys of furniture about, flinging favourite cushions under his boots for a softer rest, and crushing delicate coverings with his big body and his great black head, had the same brute selfishness at the bottom of it. The softly moving hands that were so busy among the dishes had the old wicked facility of the hands that had clung to the bars. And when he could eat no more, and sat sucking his delicate fingers one by one and wiping them on a cloth, there wanted nothing but the substitution of vine-leaves to finish the picture.

On this man, with his moustache going up and his nose coming down in that most evil of smiles, and with his surface eyes looking as if they belonged to his dyed hair, and had had their natural power of reflecting light stopped by some similar process, Nature, always true, and never working in vain, had set the mark, Beware! It was not her fault, if the warning were fruitless. She is never to blame in any such instance.

Mr Blandois, having finished his repast and cleaned his fingers, took a cigar from his pocket, and, lying on the window-seat again, smoked it out at his leisure, occasionally apostrophising the smoke as it parted from his thin lips in a thin stream:

'Blandois, you shall turn the tables on society, my little child. Haha! Holy blue, you have begun well, Blandois! At a pinch, an excellent master in English or French; a man for the bosom of families! You have a quick perception, you have humour, you have ease, you have insinuating manners, you have a good appearance; in effect, you are a gentleman! A gentleman you shall live, my small boy, and a gentleman you shall die. You shall win, however the game goes. They shall all confess your merit, Blandois. You shall subdue the society which has grievously wronged you, to your own high spirit. Death of my soul! You are high spirited by right and by nature, my Blandois!'

To such soothing murmurs did this gentleman smoke out his cigar and drink out his bottle of wine. Both being finished, he shook himself into a sitting attitude; and with the concluding serious apostrophe, 'Hold, then! Blandois, you ingenious one, have all your wits about you!' arose and went back to the house of Clennam and Co.

He was received at the door by Mistress Affery, who, under instructions from her lord, had lighted up two candles in the hall and a third on the staircase, and who conducted him to Mrs Clennam's room. Tea was prepared there, and such little company arrangements had been made as usually attended the reception of expected visitors. They were slight on the greatest occasion, never extending beyond the production of the China tea-service, and the covering of the bed with a sober and sad drapery. For the rest, there was the bier-like sofa with the block upon it, and the figure in the widow's dress, as if attired for execution; the fire topped by the mound of damped ashes; the grate with its second little mound of ashes; the kettle and the smell of black dye; all as they had been for fifteen years.

Mr Flintwinch presented the gentleman commended to the consideration of Clennam and Co. Mrs Clennam, who had the letter lying before her, bent her head and requested him to sit. They looked very closely at one another. That was but natural curiosity. 'I thank you, sir, for thinking of a disabled woman like me. Few who come here on business have any remembrance to bestow on one so removed from observation. It would be idle to expect that they should have. Out of sight, out of mind. While I am grateful for the exception, I don't complain of the rule. '

Mr Blandois, in his most gentlemanly manner, was afraid he had disturbed her by unhappily presenting himself at such an unconscionable time. For which he had already offered his best

apologies to Mr - he begged pardon - but by name had not the distinguished honour -

'Mr Flintwinch has been connected with the House many years.'

Mr Blandois was Mr Flintwinch's most obedient humble servant. He entreated Mr Flintwinch to receive the assurance of his profoundest consideration.

'My husband being dead,' said Mrs Clennam, 'and my son preferring another pursuit, our old House has no other representative in these days than Mr Flintwinch. '

'What do you call yourself?' was the surly demand of that gentleman. 'You have the head of two men.'

'My sex disqualifies me,' she proceeded with merely a slight turn of her eyes in jeremiah's direction, 'from taking a responsible part in the business, even if I had the ability; and therefore Mr Flintwinch combines my interest with his own, and conducts it. It is not what it used to be; but some of our old friends (principally the writers of this letter) have the kindness not to forget us, and we retain the power of doing what they entrust to us as efficiently as we ever did. This however is not interesting to you. You are English, sir?'

'Faith, madam, no; I am neither born nor bred in England. In effect, I am of no country,' said Mr Blandois, stretching out his leg and smiting it: 'I descend from half-a-dozen countries.'

'You have been much about the world?'

'It is true. By Heaven, madam, I have been here and there and everywhere!'

'You have no ties, probably. Are not married?'

'Madam,' said Mr Blandois, with an ugly fall of his eyebrows, 'I adore your sex, but I am not married - never was.'

Mistress Affery, who stood at the table near him, pouring out the tea, happened in her dreamy state to look at him as he said these words, and to fancy that she caught an expression in his eyes which attracted her own eyes so that she could not get them away. The effect of this fancy was to keep her staring at him with the tea-pot in her hand, not only to her own great uneasiness, but manifestly to his, too; and, through them both, to Mrs Clennam's and Mr Flintwinch's. Thus a few ghostly moments supervened, when they were all confusedly staring without knowing why.

'Affery,' her mistress was the first to say, 'what is the matter with you?'

'I don't know,' said Mistress Affery, with her disengaged left hand extended towards the visitor. 'It ain't me. It's him!'

'What does this good woman mean?' cried Mr Blandois, turning white, hot, and slowly rising with a look of such deadly wrath that it contrasted surprisingly with the slight force of his words. 'How is it possible to understand this good creature?'

'It's NOT possible,' said Mr Flintwinch, screwing himself rapidly in that direction. 'She don't know what she means. She's an idiot, a wanderer in her mind. She shall have a dose, she shall have such a dose! Get along with you, my woman,' he added in her ear, 'get along with you, while you know you're Affery, and before you're shaken to yeast.'

Mistress Affery, sensible of the danger in which her identity stood, relinquished the tea-pot as her husband seized it, put her apron over her head, and in a twinkling vanished. The visitor gradually broke into a smile, and sat down again.

'You'll excuse her, Mr Blandois,' said Jeremiah, pouring out the tea himself, 'she's failing and breaking up; that's what she's about. Do you take sugar, sir? '

'Thank you, no tea for me. - Pardon my observing it, but that's a very remarkable watch!'

The tea-table was drawn up near the sofa, with a small interval between it and Mrs Clennam's own particular table. Mr Blandois in his gallantry had risen to hand that lady her tea (her dish of toast was already there), and it was in placing the cup conveniently within her reach that the watch, lying before her as it always did, attracted his attention. Mrs Clennam looked suddenly up at him.

'May I be permitted? Thank you. A fine old-fashioned watch,' he said, taking it in his hand. 'Heavy for use, but massive and genuine. I have a partiality for everything genuine. Such as I am, I am genuine myself. Hah! A gentleman's watch with two cases in the old fashion. May I remove it from the outer case? Thank you. Aye? An old silk watch-lining, worked with beads! I have often seen these among old Dutch people and Belgians. Quaint things!'

'They are old-fashioned, too,' said Mrs Clennam. 'Very. But this is not so old as the watch, I think?'

'I think not.'

'Extraordinary how they used to complicate these cyphers!' remarked Mr Blandois, glancing up with his own smile again. 'Now is this D. N. F.? It might be almost anything.'

'Those are the letters.'

Mr Flintwinch, who had been observantly pausing all this time with a cup of tea in his hand, and his mouth open ready to swallow the contents, began to do so: always entirely filling his mouth before he emptied it at a gulp; and always deliberating again before he refilled it.

'D. N. F. was some tender, lovely, fascinating fair-creature, I make no doubt,' observed Mr Blandois, as he snapped on the case again. 'I adore her memory on the assumption. Unfortunately for my peace of mind, I adore but too readily. It may be a vice, it may be a virtue, but adoration of female beauty and merit constitutes three parts of my character, madam.'

Mr Flintwinch had by this time poured himself out another cup of tea, which he was swallowing in gulps as before, with his eyes directed to the invalid.

'You may be heart-free here, sir,' she returned to Mr Blandois. 'Those letters are not intended, I believe, for the initials of any name.'

'Of a motto, perhaps,' said Mr Blandois, casually.

'Of a sentence. They have always stood, I believe, for Do Not Forget!'

'And naturally,' said Mr Blandois, replacing the watch and stepping backward to his former chair, 'you do not forget.'

Mr Flintwinch, finishing his tea, not only took a longer gulp than he had taken yet, but made his succeeding pause under new circumstances: that is to say, with his head thrown back and his cup held still at his lips, while his eyes were still directed at the invalid. She had that force of face, and that concentrated air of collecting her firmness or obstinacy, which represented in her case what would have been gesture and action in another, as she replied with her deliberate strength of speech: 'No, sir, I do not forget. To lead a life as monotonous as mine has been during many years, is not the way to forget. To lead a life of self-correction is not the way to forget. To be sensible of having (as we all have, every one of us, all the children of Adam!) offences to expiate and peace to make, does not justify the desire to forget. Therefore I have long dismissed it, and I neither forget nor wish to forget.'

Mr Flintwinch, who had latterly been shaking the sediment at the bottom of his tea-cup, round and round, here gulped it down, and putting the cup in the tea-tray, as done with, turned his eyes upon Mr Blandois as if to ask him what he thought of that?

'All expressed, madam,' said Mr Blandois, with his smoothest bow and his white hand on his breast, 'by the word 'naturally,' which I am proud to have had sufficient apprehension and appreciation (but without appreciation I could not be Blandois) to employ.'

'Pardon me, sir,' she returned, 'if I doubt the likelihood of a gentleman of pleasure, and change, and politeness, accustomed to court and to be courted - '

'Oh madam! By Heaven!'

' - If I doubt the likelihood of such a character quite comprehending what belongs to mine in my circumstances. Not to obtrude doctrine upon you,' she looked at the rigid pile of hard pale books before her, '(for you go your own way, and the consequences are on your own head), I will say this much: that I shape my course by pilots, strictly by proved and tried pilots, under whom I cannot be shipwrecked - can not be - and that if I were unmindful of the admonition conveyed in those three letters, I should not be half as chastened as I am.'

It was curious how she seized the occasion to argue with some invisible opponent. Perhaps with her own better sense, always turning upon herself and her own deception.

'If I forgot my ignorances in my life of health and freedom, I might complain of the life to which I am now condemned. I never do; I never have done. If I forgot that this scene, the Earth, is expressly meant to be a scene of gloom, and hardship, and dark trial, for the creatures who are made out of its dust, I might have some tenderness for its vanities. But I have no such tenderness. If I did not know that we are, every one, the subject (most justly the subject) of a wrath that must be satisfied, and against which mere actions are nothing, I might repine at the difference between me, imprisoned here, and the people who pass that gateway yonder. But I take it as a grace and favour to be elected to make the satisfaction I am making here, to know what I know for certain here, and to work out what I have worked out here. My affliction might otherwise have had no meaning to me. Hence I would forget, and I do forget, nothing. Hence I am contented, and say it is better with me than with millions.' As she spoke these words, she put her hand upon the watch, and restored it to the precise spot on her little table which it always occupied. With her touch lingering upon it, she sat for some moments afterwards, looking at it steadily and half-defiantly.

Mr Blandois, during this exposition, had been strictly attentive, keeping his eyes fastened on the lady, and thoughtfully stroking his moustache with his two hands. Mr Flintwinch had been a little fidgety, and now struck in.

'There, there, there!' said he. 'That is quite understood, Mrs Clennam, and you have spoken piously and well. Mr Blandois, I suspect, is not of a pious cast.' 'On the contrary, sir!' that gentleman protested, snapping his fingers. 'Your pardon! It's a part of my character. I am sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative. A sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative man, Mr Flintwinch, must be that, or nothing!'

There was an inkling of suspicion in Mr Flintwinch's face that he might be nothing, as he swaggered out of his chair (it was characteristic of this man, as it is of all men similarly marked, that whatever he did, he overdid, though it were sometimes by only a hairsbreadth), and approached to take his leave of Mrs Clennam.

'With what will appear to you the egotism of a sick old woman, sir,' she then said, 'though really through your accidental allusion, I have been led away into the subject of myself and my infirmities. Being so considerate as to visit me, I hope you will be likewise so considerate as to overlook that. Don't compliment me, if you please.' For he was evidently going to do it. 'Mr Flintwinch will be happy to render you any service, and I hope your stay in this city may prove agreeable.'

Mr Blandois thanked her, and kissed his hand several times. 'This is an old room,' he remarked, with a sudden sprightliness of manner, looking round when he got near the door, 'I have been so interested that I have not observed it. But it's a genuine old room.'

'It is a genuine old house,' said Mrs Clennam, with her frozen smile. 'A place of no pretensions, but a piece of antiquity.'

'Faith!' cried the visitor. 'If Mr Flintwinch would do me the favour to take me through the rooms on my way out, he could hardly oblige me more. An old house is a weakness with me. I have many weaknesses, but none greater. I love and study the picturesque in all its varieties. I have been called picturesque myself. It is no merit to be picturesque - I have greater merits, perhaps - but I may be, by an accident. Sympathy, sympathy!'

'I tell you beforehand, Mr Blandois, that you'll find it very dingy and very bare,' said Jeremiah, taking up the candle. 'It's not worth your looking at.' But Mr Blandois, smiting him in a friendly manner on the back, only laughed; so the said Blandois kissed his hand again to Mrs Clennam, and they went out of the room together.

'You don't care to go up-stairs?' said Jeremiah, on the landing. 'On the contrary, Mr Flintwinch; if not tiresome to you, I shall be ravished!'

Mr Flintwinch, therefore, wormed himself up the staircase, and Mr Blandois followed close. They ascended to the great garret bed-room which Arthur had occupied on the night of his return. 'There, Mr Blandois!' said Jeremiah, showing it, 'I hope you may think that worth coming so high to see. I confess I don't.'

Mr Blandois being enraptured, they walked through other garrets and passages, and came down the staircase again. By this time Mr Flintwinch had remarked that he never found the visitor looking at any room, after throwing one quick glance around, but always found the visitor looking at him, Mr Flintwinch. With this discovery in his thoughts, he turned about on the staircase for another experiment. He met his eyes directly; and on the instant of their fixing one another, the visitor, with that ugly play of nose and moustache, laughed (as he had done at every similar moment since they left Mrs Clennam's chamber) a diabolically silent laugh.

As a much shorter man than the visitor, Mr Flintwinch was at the physical disadvantage of being thus disagreeably leered at from a height; and as he went first down the staircase, and was usually a step or two lower than the other, this disadvantage was at the time increased. He postponed looking at Mr Blandois again until this accidental inequality was removed by their having entered the late Mr Clennam's room. But, then twisting himself suddenly round upon him, he found his look unchanged.

'A most admirable old house,' smiled Mr Blandois. 'So mysterious. Do you never hear any haunted noises here?'

'Noises,' returned Mr Flintwinch. 'No.'

'Nor see any devils?'

'Not,' said Mr Flintwinch, grimly screwing himself at his questioner, 'not any that introduce themselves under that name and in that capacity.'

'Haha! A portrait here, I see.'

(Still looking at Mr Flintwinch, as if he were the portrait.)

'It's a portrait, sir, as you observe.'

'May I ask the subject, Mr Flintwinch?'

'Mr Clennam, deceased. Her husband.' 'Former owner of the remarkable watch, perhaps?' said the visitor.

Mr Flintwinch, who had cast his eyes towards the portrait, twisted himself about again, and again found himself the subject of the same look and smile. 'Yes, Mr Blandois,' he replied tartly. 'It was his, and his uncle's before him, and Lord knows who before him; and that's all I can tell you of its pedigree.'

'That's a strongly marked character, Mr Flintwinch, our friend upstairs.'

'Yes, sir,' said Jeremiah, twisting himself at the visitor again, as he did during the whole of this dialogue, like some screw-machine that fell short of its grip; for the other never changed, and he always felt obliged to retreat a little. 'She is a remarkable woman. Great fortitude - great strength of mind.'

'They must have been very happy,' said Blandois.

'Who?' demanded Mr Flintwinch, with another screw at him.

Mr Blandois shook his right forefinger towards the sick room, and his left forefinger towards the portrait, and then, putting his arms akimbo and striding his legs wide apart, stood smiling down at Mr Flintwinch with the advancing nose and the retreating moustache.

'As happy as most other married people, I suppose,' returned Mr Flintwinch. 'I can't say. I don't know. There are secrets in all families.'

'Secrets!' cried Mr Blandois, quickly. 'Say it again, my son.'

'I say,' replied Mr Flintwinch, upon whom he had swelled himself so suddenly that Mr Flintwinch found his face almost brushed by the dilated chest. 'I say there are secrets in all families.'

'So there are,' cried the other, clapping him on both shoulders, and rolling him backwards and forwards. 'Haha! you are right. So there are! Secrets! Holy Blue! There are the devil's own secrets in some families, Mr Flintwinch!' With that, after clapping Mr Flintwinch on both shoulders several times, as if in a friendly and humorous way he were rallying him on a joke he had made, he threw up his arms, threw back his head, hooked his hands together behind it, and burst into a roar of laughter. It was in vain for Mr Flintwinch to try another screw at him. He had his laugh out.

'But, favour me with the candle a moment,' he said, when he had done. 'Let us have a look at the husband of the remarkable lady. Hah!'

holding up the light at arm's length. 'A decided expression of face here too, though not of the same character. Looks as if he were saying, what is it - Do Not Forget - does he not, Mr Flintwinch?

By Heaven, sir, he does!

As he returned the candle, he looked at him once more; and then, leisurely strolling out with him into the hall, declared it to be a charming old house indeed, and one which had so greatly pleased him that he would not have missed inspecting it for a hundred pounds. Throughout these singular freedoms on the part of Mr Blandois, which involved a general alteration in his demeanour, making it much coarser and rougher, much more violent and audacious than before, Mr Flintwinch, whose leathern face was not liable to many changes, preserved its immobility intact. Beyond now appearing perhaps, to have been left hanging a trifle too long before that friendly operation of cutting down, he outwardly maintained an equable composure. They had brought their survey to a close in the little room at the side of the hall, and he stood there, eyeing Mr Blandois.

'I am glad you are so well satisfied, sir,' was his calm remark. 'I didn't expect it. You seem to be quite in good spirits.'

'In admirable spirits,' returned Blandois. 'Word of honour! never more refreshed in spirits. Do you ever have presentiments, Mr Flintwinch?'

'I am not sure that I know what you mean by the term, sir,' replied that gentleman.

'Say, in this case, Mr Flintwinch, undefined anticipations of pleasure to come.'

'I can't say I'm sensible of such a sensation at present,' returned Mr Flintwinch with the utmost gravity. 'If I should find it coming on, I'll mention it.'

'Now I,' said Blandois, 'I, my son, have a presentiment to-night that we shall be well acquainted. Do you find it coming on?'

'N-no,' returned Mr Flintwinch, deliberately inquiring of himself. 'I can't say I do.'

'I have a strong presentiment that we shall become intimately acquainted. - You have no feeling of that sort yet?'

'Not yet,' said Mr Flintwinch.

Mr Blandois, taking him by both shoulders again, rolled him about a little in his former merry way, then drew his arm through his own, and invited him to come off and drink a bottle of wine like a dear deep old dog as he was.

Without a moment's indecision, Mr Flintwinch accepted the invitation, and they went out to the quarters where the traveller was lodged, through a heavy rain which had rattled on the windows, roofs, and pavements, ever since nightfall. The thunder and lightning had long ago passed over, but the rain was furious. On their arrival at Mr Blandois' room, a bottle of port wine was ordered by that gallant gentleman; who (crushing every pretty thing he could collect, in the soft disposition of his dainty figure) coiled himself upon the window-seat, while Mr Flintwinch took a chair opposite to him, with the table between them. Mr Blandois proposed having the largest glasses in the house, to which Mr Flintwinch assented. The bumpers filled, Mr Blandois, with a roystering gaiety, clinked the top of his glass against the bottom of Mr Flintwinch's, and the bottom of his glass against the top of Mr Flintwinch's, and drank to the intimate acquaintance he foresaw.

Mr Flintwinch gravely pledged him, and drank all the wine he could get, and said nothing. As often as Mr Blandois clinked glasses (which was at every replenishment), Mr Flintwinch stolidly did his part of the clinking, and would have stolidly done his companion's part of the wine as well as his own: being, except in the article of palate, a mere cask.

In short, Mr Blandois found that to pour port wine into the reticent Flintwinch was, not to open him but to shut him up. Moreover, he had the appearance of a perfect ability to go on all night; or, if occasion were, all next day and all next night; whereas Mr Blandois soon grew indistinctly conscious of swaggering too fiercely and boastfully. He therefore terminated the entertainment at the end of the third bottle.

'You will draw upon us to-morrow, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch, with a business-like face at parting.

'My Cabbage,' returned the other, taking him by the collar with both hands, 'I'll draw upon you; have no fear. Adieu, my Flintwinch. Receive at parting;' here he gave him a southern embrace, and kissed him soundly on both cheeks; 'the word of a gentleman! By a thousand Thunders, you shall see me again!'

He did not present himself next day, though the letter of advice came duly to hand. Inquiring after him at night, Mr Flintwinch found, with surprise, that he had paid his bill and gone back to the Continent by way of Calais. Nevertheless, Jeremiah scraped out of his cogitating

face a lively conviction that Mr Blandois would keep his word on this occasion, and would be seen again.