

## Chapter XVIII

### **Miss Knag, after doting on Kate Nickleby for three whole Days, makes up her Mind to hate her for evermore. The Causes which led Miss Knag to form this Resolution**

There are many lives of much pain, hardship, and suffering, which, having no stirring interest for any but those who lead them, are disregarded by persons who do not want thought or feeling, but who pamper their compassion and need high stimulants to rouse it.

There are not a few among the disciples of charity who require, in their vocation, scarcely less excitement than the votaries of pleasure in theirs; and hence it is that diseased sympathy and compassion are every day expended on out-of-the-way objects, when only too many demands upon the legitimate exercise of the same virtues in a healthy state, are constantly within the sight and hearing of the most unobservant person alive. In short, charity must have its romance, as the novelist or playwright must have his. A thief in fustian is a vulgar character, scarcely to be thought of by persons of refinement; but dress him in green velvet, with a high-crowned hat, and change the scene of his operations, from a thickly-peopled city, to a mountain road, and you shall find in him the very soul of poetry and adventure. So it is with the one great cardinal virtue, which, properly nourished and exercised, leads to, if it does not necessarily include, all the others. It must have its romance; and the less of real, hard, struggling work-a-day life there is in that romance, the better.

The life to which poor Kate Nickleby was devoted, in consequence of the unforeseen train of circumstances already developed in this narrative, was a hard one; but lest the very dulness, unhealthy confinement, and bodily fatigue, which made up its sum and substance, should deprive it of any interest with the mass of the charitable and sympathetic, I would rather keep Miss Nickleby herself in view just now, than chill them in the outset, by a minute and lengthened description of the establishment presided over by Madame Mantalini.

'Well, now, indeed, Madame Mantalini,' said Miss Knag, as Kate was taking her weary way homewards on the first night of her novitiate; 'that Miss Nickleby is a very creditable young person - a very creditable young person indeed - hem - upon my word, Madame Mantalini, it does very extraordinary credit even to your discrimination that you should have found such a very excellent, very well-behaved, very - hem - very unassuming young woman to assist in the fitting on. I have seen some young women when they had the opportunity of displaying before their betters, behave in such a - oh, dear - well - but you're always right, Madame Mantalini, always; and

as I very often tell the young ladies, how you do contrive to be always right, when so many people are so often wrong, is to me a mystery indeed.'

'Beyond putting a very excellent client out of humour, Miss Nickleby has not done anything very remarkable today - that I am aware of, at least,' said Madame Mantalini in reply.

'Oh, dear!' said Miss Knag; 'but you must allow a great deal for inexperience, you know.'

'And youth?' inquired Madame.

'Oh, I say nothing about that, Madame Mantalini,' replied Miss Knag, reddening; 'because if youth were any excuse, you wouldn't have - '

'Quite so good a forewoman as I have, I suppose,' suggested Madame.

'Well, I never did know anybody like you, Madame Mantalini,' rejoined Miss Knag most complacently, 'and that's the fact, for you know what one's going to say, before it has time to rise to one's lips. Oh, very good! Ha, ha, ha!'

'For myself,' observed Madame Mantalini, glancing with affected carelessness at her assistant, and laughing heartily in her sleeve, 'I consider Miss Nickleby the most awkward girl I ever saw in my life.'

'Poor dear thing,' said Miss Knag, 'it's not her fault. If it was, we might hope to cure it; but as it's her misfortune, Madame Mantalini, why really you know, as the man said about the blind horse, we ought to respect it.'

'Her uncle told me she had been considered pretty,' remarked Madame Mantalini. 'I think her one of the most ordinary girls I ever met with.'

'Ordinary!' cried Miss Knag with a countenance beaming delight; 'and awkward! Well, all I can say is, Madame Mantalini, that I quite love the poor girl; and that if she was twice as indifferent-looking, and twice as awkward as she is, I should be only so much the more her friend, and that's the truth of it.'

In fact, Miss Knag had conceived an incipient affection for Kate Nickleby, after witnessing her failure that morning, and this short conversation with her superior increased the favourable prepossession to a most surprising extent; which was the more remarkable, as when she first scanned that young lady's face and figure, she had entertained certain inward misgivings that they would never agree.

'But now,' said Miss Knag, glancing at the reflection of herself in a mirror at no great distance, 'I love her - I quite love her - I declare I do!'

Of such a highly disinterested quality was this devoted friendship, and so superior was it to the little weaknesses of flattery or ill-nature, that the kind-hearted Miss Knag candidly informed Kate Nickleby, next day, that she saw she would never do for the business, but that she need not give herself the slightest uneasiness on this account, for that she (Miss Knag), by increased exertions on her own part, would keep her as much as possible in the background, and that all she would have to do, would be to remain perfectly quiet before company, and to shrink from attracting notice by every means in her power. This last suggestion was so much in accordance with the timid girl's own feelings and wishes, that she readily promised implicit reliance on the excellent spinster's advice: without questioning, or indeed bestowing a moment's reflection upon, the motives that dictated it.

'I take quite a lively interest in you, my dear soul, upon my word,' said Miss Knag; 'a sister's interest, actually. It's the most singular circumstance I ever knew.'

Undoubtedly it was singular, that if Miss Knag did feel a strong interest in Kate Nickleby, it should not rather have been the interest of a maiden aunt or grandmother; that being the conclusion to which the difference in their respective ages would have naturally tended. But Miss Knag wore clothes of a very youthful pattern, and perhaps her feelings took the same shape.

'Bless you!' said Miss Knag, bestowing a kiss upon Kate at the conclusion of the second day's work, 'how very awkward you have been all day.'

'I fear your kind and open communication, which has rendered me more painfully conscious of my own defects, has not improved me,' sighed Kate.

'No, no, I dare say not,' rejoined Miss Knag, in a most uncommon flow of good humour. 'But how much better that you should know it at first, and so be able to go on, straight and comfortable! Which way are you walking, my love?'

'Towards the city,' replied Kate.

'The city!' cried Miss Knag, regarding herself with great favour in the glass as she tied her bonnet. 'Goodness gracious me! now do you really live in the city?'

'Is it so very unusual for anybody to live there?' asked Kate, half smiling.

'I couldn't have believed it possible that any young woman could have lived there, under any circumstances whatever, for three days together,' replied Miss Knag.

'Reduced - I should say poor people,' answered Kate, correcting herself hastily, for she was afraid of appearing proud, 'must live where they can.'

'Ah! very true, so they must; very proper indeed!' rejoined Miss Knag with that sort of half-sigh, which, accompanied by two or three slight nods of the head, is pity's small change in general society; 'and that's what I very often tell my brother, when our servants go away ill, one after another, and he thinks the back-kitchen's rather too damp for 'em to sleep in. These sort of people, I tell him, are glad to sleep anywhere! Heaven suits the back to the burden. What a nice thing it is to think that it should be so, isn't it?'

'Very,' replied Kate.

'I'll walk with you part of the way, my dear,' said Miss Knag, 'for you must go very near our house; and as it's quite dark, and our last servant went to the hospital a week ago, with St Anthony's fire in her face, I shall be glad of your company.'

Kate would willingly have excused herself from this flattering companionship; but Miss Knag having adjusted her bonnet to her entire satisfaction, took her arm with an air which plainly showed how much she felt the compliment she was conferring, and they were in the street before she could say another word.

'I fear,' said Kate, hesitating, 'that mama - my mother, I mean - is waiting for me.'

'You needn't make the least apology, my dear,' said Miss Knag, smiling sweetly as she spoke; 'I dare say she is a very respectable old person, and I shall be quite - hem - quite pleased to know her.'

As poor Mrs Nickleby was cooling - not her heels alone, but her limbs generally at the street corner, Kate had no alternative but to make her known to Miss Knag, who, doing the last new carriage customer at second-hand, acknowledged the introduction with condescending politeness. The three then walked away, arm in arm: with Miss Knag in the middle, in a special state of amiability.

'I have taken such a fancy to your daughter, Mrs Nickleby, you can't think,' said Miss Knag, after she had proceeded a little distance in dignified silence.

'I am delighted to hear it,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'though it is nothing new to me, that even strangers should like Kate.'

'Hem!' cried Miss Knag.

'You will like her better when you know how good she is,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'It is a great blessing to me, in my misfortunes, to have a child, who knows neither pride nor vanity, and whose bringing-up might very well have excused a little of both at first. You don't know what it is to lose a husband, Miss Knag.'

As Miss Knag had never yet known what it was to gain one, it followed, very nearly as a matter of course, that she didn't know what it was to lose one; so she said, in some haste, 'No, indeed I don't,' and said it with an air intending to signify that she should like to catch herself marrying anybody - no, no, she knew better than that.

'Kate has improved even in this little time, I have no doubt,' said Mrs Nickleby, glancing proudly at her daughter.

'Oh! of course,' said Miss Knag.

'And will improve still more,' added Mrs Nickleby.

'That she will, I'll be bound,' replied Miss Knag, squeezing Kate's arm in her own, to point the joke.

'She always was clever,' said poor Mrs Nickleby, brightening up, 'always, from a baby. I recollect when she was only two years and a half old, that a gentleman who used to visit very much at our house - Mr Watkins, you know, Kate, my dear, that your poor papa went bail for, who afterwards ran away to the United States, and sent us a pair of snow shoes, with such an affectionate letter that it made your poor dear father cry for a week. You remember the letter? In which he said that he was very sorry he couldn't repay the fifty pounds just then, because his capital was all out at interest, and he was very busy making his fortune, but that he didn't forget you were his god-daughter, and he should take it very unkind if we didn't buy you a silver coral and put it down to his old account? Dear me, yes, my dear, how stupid you are! and spoke so affectionately of the old port wine that he used to drink a bottle and a half of every time he came. You must remember, Kate?'

'Yes, yes, mama; what of him?'

'Why, that Mr Watkins, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby slowly, as if she were making a tremendous effort to recollect something of paramount importance; 'that Mr Watkins - he wasn't any relation, Miss Knag will understand, to the Watkins who kept the Old Boar in the village; by-the-bye, I don't remember whether it was the Old Boar or the George the Third, but it was one of the two, I know, and it's much the same - that Mr Watkins said, when you were only two years and a half old, that you were one of the most astonishing children he ever saw. He did indeed, Miss Knag, and he wasn't at all fond of children, and couldn't have had the slightest motive for doing it. I know it was he who said so, because I recollect, as well as if it was only yesterday, his borrowing twenty pounds of her poor dear papa the very moment afterwards.'

Having quoted this extraordinary and most disinterested testimony to her daughter's excellence, Mrs Nickleby stopped to breathe; and Miss Knag, finding that the discourse was turning upon family greatness, lost no time in striking in, with a small reminiscence on her own account.

'Don't talk of lending money, Mrs Nickleby,' said Miss Knag, 'or you'll drive me crazy, perfectly crazy. My mama - hem - was the most lovely and beautiful creature, with the most striking and exquisite - hem - the most exquisite nose that ever was put upon a human face, I do believe, Mrs Nickleby (here Miss Knag rubbed her own nose sympathetically); the most delightful and accomplished woman, perhaps, that ever was seen; but she had that one failing of lending money, and carried it to such an extent that she lent - hem - oh! thousands of pounds, all our little fortunes, and what's more, Mrs Nickleby, I don't think, if we were to live till - till - hem - till the very end of time, that we should ever get them back again. I don't indeed.'

After concluding this effort of invention without being interrupted, Miss Knag fell into many more recollections, no less interesting than true, the full tide of which, Mrs Nickleby in vain attempting to stem, at length sailed smoothly down by adding an under-current of her own recollections; and so both ladies went on talking together in perfect contentment; the only difference between them being, that whereas Miss Knag addressed herself to Kate, and talked very loud, Mrs Nickleby kept on in one unbroken monotonous flow, perfectly satisfied to be talking and caring very little whether anybody listened or not.

In this manner they walked on, very amicably, until they arrived at Miss Knag's brother's, who was an ornamental stationer and small circulating library keeper, in a by-street off Tottenham Court Road; and who let out by the day, week, month, or year, the newest old novels, whereof the titles were displayed in pen-and-ink characters on a sheet of pasteboard, swinging at his door-post. As Miss Knag

happened, at the moment, to be in the middle of an account of her twenty-second offer from a gentleman of large property, she insisted upon their all going in to supper together; and in they went.

'Don't go away, Mortimer,' said Miss Knag as they entered the shop. 'It's only one of our young ladies and her mother. Mrs and Miss Nickleby.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Mr Mortimer Knag. 'Ah!'

Having given utterance to these ejaculations with a very profound and thoughtful air, Mr Knag slowly snuffed two kitchen candles on the counter, and two more in the window, and then snuffed himself from a box in his waistcoat pocket.

There was something very impressive in the ghostly air with which all this was done; and as Mr Knag was a tall lank gentleman of solemn features, wearing spectacles, and garnished with much less hair than a gentleman bordering on forty, or thereabouts, usually boasts, Mrs Nickleby whispered her daughter that she thought he must be literary.

'Past ten,' said Mr Knag, consulting his watch. 'Thomas, close the warehouse.'

Thomas was a boy nearly half as tall as a shutter, and the warehouse was a shop about the size of three hackney coaches.

'Ah!' said Mr Knag once more, heaving a deep sigh as he restored to its parent shelf the book he had been reading. 'Well - yes - I believe supper is ready, sister.'

With another sigh Mr Knag took up the kitchen candles from the counter, and preceded the ladies with mournful steps to a back-parlour, where a charwoman, employed in the absence of the sick servant, and remunerated with certain eighteenpences to be deducted from her wages due, was putting the supper out.

'Mrs Blockson,' said Miss Knag, reproachfully, 'how very often I have begged you not to come into the room with your bonnet on!'

'I can't help it, Miss Knag,' said the charwoman, bridling up on the shortest notice. 'There's been a deal o'cleaning to do in this house, and if you don't like it, I must trouble you to look out for somebody else, for it don't hardly pay me, and that's the truth, if I was to be hung this minute.'

'I don't want any remarks if YOU please,' said Miss Knag, with a strong emphasis on the personal pronoun. 'Is there any fire downstairs for some hot water presently?'

'No there is not, indeed, Miss Knag,' replied the substitute; 'and so I won't tell you no stories about it.'

'Then why isn't there?' said Miss Knag.

'Because there arn't no coals left out, and if I could make coals I would, but as I can't I won't, and so I make bold to tell you, Mem,' replied Mrs Blockson.

'Will you hold your tongue - female?' said Mr Mortimer Knag, plunging violently into this dialogue.

'By your leave, Mr Knag,' retorted the charwoman, turning sharp round. 'I'm only too glad not to speak in this house, excepting when and where I'm spoke to, sir; and with regard to being a female, sir, I should wish to know what you considered yourself?'

'A miserable wretch,' exclaimed Mr Knag, striking his forehead. 'A miserable wretch.'

'I'm very glad to find that you don't call yourself out of your name, sir,' said Mrs Blockson; 'and as I had two twin children the day before yesterday was only seven weeks, and my little Charley fell down a airy and put his elber out, last Monday, I shall take it as a favour if you'll send nine shillings, for one week's work, to my house, afore the clock strikes ten tomorrow.'

With these parting words, the good woman quitted the room with great ease of manner, leaving the door wide open; Mr Knag, at the same moment, flung himself into the 'warehouse,' and groaned aloud.

'What is the matter with that gentleman, pray?' inquired Mrs Nickleby, greatly disturbed by the sound.

'Is he ill?' inquired Kate, really alarmed.

'Hush!' replied Miss Knag; 'a most melancholy history. He was once most devotedly attached to - hem - to Madame Mantalini.'

'Bless me!' exclaimed Mrs Nickleby.

'Yes,' continued Miss Knag, 'and received great encouragement too, and confidently hoped to marry her. He has a most romantic heart, Mrs Nickleby, as indeed - hem - as indeed all our family have, and the



disappointment was a dreadful blow. He is a wonderfully accomplished man - most extraordinarily accomplished - reads - hem - reads every novel that comes out; I mean every novel that - hem - that has any fashion in it, of course. The fact is, that he did find so much in the books he read, applicable to his own misfortunes, and did find himself in every respect so much like the heroes - because of course he is conscious of his own superiority, as we all are, and very naturally - that he took to scorning everything, and became a genius; and I am quite sure that he is, at this very present moment, writing another book.'

'Another book!' repeated Kate, finding that a pause was left for somebody to say something.

'Yes,' said Miss Knag, nodding in great triumph; 'another book, in three volumes post octavo. Of course it's a great advantage to him, in all his little fashionable descriptions, to have the benefit of my - hem - of my experience, because, of course, few authors who write about such things can have such opportunities of knowing them as I have. He's so wrapped up in high life, that the least allusion to business or worldly matters - like that woman just now, for instance - quite distracts him; but, as I often say, I think his disappointment a great thing for him, because if he hadn't been disappointed he couldn't have written about blighted hopes and all that; and the fact is, if it hadn't happened as it has, I don't believe his genius would ever have come out at all.'

How much more communicative Miss Knag might have become under more favourable circumstances, it is impossible to divine, but as the gloomy one was within ear-shot, and the fire wanted making up, her disclosures stopped here. To judge from all appearances, and the difficulty of making the water warm, the last servant could not have been much accustomed to any other fire than St Anthony's; but a little brandy and water was made at last, and the guests, having been previously regaled with cold leg of mutton and bread and cheese, soon afterwards took leave; Kate amusing herself, all the way home, with the recollection of her last glimpse of Mr Mortimer Knag deeply abstracted in the shop; and Mrs Nickleby by debating within herself whether the dressmaking firm would ultimately become 'Mantalini, Knag, and Nickleby', or 'Mantalini, Nickleby, and Knag'.

At this high point, Miss Knag's friendship remained for three whole days, much to the wonderment of Madame Mantalini's young ladies who had never beheld such constancy in that quarter, before; but on the fourth, it received a check no less violent than sudden, which thus occurred.

It happened that an old lord of great family, who was going to marry a young lady of no family in particular, came with the young lady, and the young lady's sister, to witness the ceremony of trying on two nuptial bonnets which had been ordered the day before, and Madame Mantalini announcing the fact, in a shrill treble, through the speaking-pipe, which communicated with the workroom, Miss Knag darted hastily upstairs with a bonnet in each hand, and presented herself in the show-room, in a charming state of palpitation, intended to demonstrate her enthusiasm in the cause. The bonnets were no sooner fairly on, than Miss Knag and Madame Mantalini fell into convulsions of admiration.

'A most elegant appearance,' said Madame Mantalini.

'I never saw anything so exquisite in all my life,' said Miss Knag.

Now, the old lord, who was a VERY old lord, said nothing, but mumbled and chuckled in a state of great delight, no less with the nuptial bonnets and their wearers, than with his own address in getting such a fine woman for his wife; and the young lady, who was a very lively young lady, seeing the old lord in this rapturous condition, chased the old lord behind a cheval-glass, and then and there kissed him, while Madame Mantalini and the other young lady looked, discreetly, another way.

But, pending the salutation, Miss Knag, who was tinged with curiosity, stepped accidentally behind the glass, and encountered the lively young lady's eye just at the very moment when she kissed the old lord; upon which the young lady, in a pouting manner, murmured something about 'an old thing,' and 'great impertinence,' and finished by darting a look of displeasure at Miss Knag, and smiling contemptuously.

'Madame Mantalini,' said the young lady.

'Ma'am,' said Madame Mantalini.

'Pray have up that pretty young creature we saw yesterday.'

'Oh yes, do,' said the sister.

'Of all things in the world, Madame Mantalini,' said the lord's intended, throwing herself languidly on a sofa, 'I hate being waited upon by frights or elderly persons. Let me always see that young creature, I beg, whenever I come.'

'By all means,' said the old lord; 'the lovely young creature, by all means.'

'Everybody is talking about her,' said the young lady, in the same careless manner; 'and my lord, being a great admirer of beauty, must positively see her.'

'She IS universally admired,' replied Madame Mantalini. 'Miss Knag, send up Miss Nickleby. You needn't return.'

'I beg your pardon, Madame Mantalini, what did you say last?' asked Miss Knag, trembling.

'You needn't return,' repeated the superior, sharply. Miss Knag vanished without another word, and in all reasonable time was replaced by Kate, who took off the new bonnets and put on the old ones: blushing very much to find that the old lord and the two young ladies were staring her out of countenance all the time.

'Why, how you colour, child!' said the lord's chosen bride.

'She is not quite so accustomed to her business, as she will be in a week or two,' interposed Madame Mantalini with a gracious smile.

'I am afraid you have been giving her some of your wicked looks, my lord,' said the intended.

'No, no, no,' replied the old lord, 'no, no, I'm going to be married, and lead a new life. Ha, ha, ha! a new life, a new life! ha, ha, ha!'

It was a satisfactory thing to hear that the old gentleman was going to lead a new life, for it was pretty evident that his old one would not last him much longer. The mere exertion of protracted chuckling reduced him to a fearful ebb of coughing and gasping; it was some minutes before he could find breath to remark that the girl was too pretty for a milliner.

'I hope you don't think good looks a disqualification for the business, my lord,' said Madame Mantalini, simpering.

'Not by any means,' replied the old lord, 'or you would have left it long ago.'

'You naughty creature,' said the lively lady, poking the peer with her parasol; 'I won't have you talk so. How dare you?'

This playful inquiry was accompanied with another poke, and another, and then the old lord caught the parasol, and wouldn't give it up again, which induced the other lady to come to the rescue, and some very pretty sportiveness ensued.

'You will see that those little alterations are made, Madame Mantalini,' said the lady. 'Nay, you bad man, you positively shall go first; I wouldn't leave you behind with that pretty girl, not for half a second. I know you too well. Jane, my dear, let him go first, and we shall be quite sure of him.'

The old lord, evidently much flattered by this suspicion, bestowed a grotesque leer upon Kate as he passed; and, receiving another tap with the parasol for his wickedness, tottered downstairs to the door, where his sprightly body was hoisted into the carriage by two stout footmen.

'Foh!' said Madame Mantalini, 'how he ever gets into a carriage without thinking of a hearse, I can't think. There, take the things away, my dear, take them away.'

Kate, who had remained during the whole scene with her eyes modestly fixed upon the ground, was only too happy to avail herself of the permission to retire, and hasten joyfully downstairs to Miss Knag's dominion.

The circumstances of the little kingdom had greatly changed, however, during the short period of her absence. In place of Miss Knag being stationed in her accustomed seat, preserving all the dignity and greatness of Madame Mantalini's representative, that worthy soul was reposing on a large box, bathed in tears, while three or four of the young ladies in close attendance upon her, together with the presence of hartshorn, vinegar, and other restoratives, would have borne ample testimony, even without the derangement of the head-dress and front row of curls, to her having fainted desperately.

'Bless me!' said Kate, stepping hastily forward, 'what is the matter?'

This inquiry produced in Miss Knag violent symptoms of a relapse; and several young ladies, darting angry looks at Kate, applied more vinegar and hartshorn, and said it was 'a shame.'

'What is a shame?' demanded Kate. 'What is the matter? What has happened? tell me.'

'Matter!' cried Miss Knag, coming, all at once, bolt upright, to the great consternation of the assembled maidens; 'matter! Fie upon you, you nasty creature!'

'Gracious!' cried Kate, almost paralysed by the violence with which the adjective had been jerked out from between Miss Knag's closed teeth; 'have I offended you?'

'YOU offended me!' retorted Miss Knag, 'YOU! a chit, a child, an upstart nobody! Oh, indeed! Ha, ha!'

Now, it was evident, as Miss Knag laughed, that something struck her as being exceedingly funny; and as the young ladies took their tone from Miss Knag - she being the chief - they all got up a laugh without a moment's delay, and nodded their heads a little, and smiled sarcastically to each other, as much as to say how very good that was!

'Here she is,' continued Miss Knag, getting off the box, and introducing Kate with much ceremony and many low curtsies to the delighted throng; 'here she is - everybody is talking about her - the belle, ladies - the beauty, the - oh, you bold-faced thing!'

At this crisis, Miss Knag was unable to repress a virtuous shudder, which immediately communicated itself to all the young ladies; after which, Miss Knag laughed, and after that, cried.

'For fifteen years,' exclaimed Miss Knag, sobbing in a most affecting manner, 'for fifteen years have I been the credit and ornament of this room and the one upstairs. Thank God,' said Miss Knag, stamping first her right foot and then her left with remarkable energy, 'I have never in all that time, till now, been exposed to the arts, the vile arts, of a creature, who disgraces us with all her proceedings, and makes proper people blush for themselves. But I feel it, I do feel it, although I am disgusted.'

Miss Knag here relapsed into softness, and the young ladies renewing their attentions, murmured that she ought to be superior to such things, and that for their part they despised them, and considered them beneath their notice; in witness whereof, they called out, more emphatically than before, that it was a shame, and that they felt so angry, they did, they hardly knew what to do with themselves.

'Have I lived to this day to be called a fright!' cried Miss Knag, suddenly becoming convulsive, and making an effort to tear her front off.

'Oh no, no,' replied the chorus, 'pray don't say so; don't now!'

'Have I deserved to be called an elderly person?' screamed Miss Knag, wrestling with the supernumeraries.

'Don't think of such things, dear,' answered the chorus.

'I hate her,' cried Miss Knag; 'I detest and hate her. Never let her speak to me again; never let anybody who is a friend of mine speak to her; a slut, a hussy, an impudent artful hussy!' Having denounced the

object of her wrath, in these terms, Miss Knag screamed once, hiccuped thrice, gurgled in her throat several times, slumbered, shivered, woke, came to, composed her head-dress, and declared herself quite well again.

Poor Kate had regarded these proceedings, at first, in perfect bewilderment. She had then turned red and pale by turns, and once or twice essayed to speak; but, as the true motives of this altered behaviour developed themselves, she retired a few paces, and looked calmly on without deigning a reply. Nevertheless, although she walked proudly to her seat, and turned her back upon the group of little satellites who clustered round their ruling planet in the remotest corner of the room, she gave way, in secret, to some such bitter tears as would have gladdened Miss Knag's inmost soul, if she could have seen them fall.