

## Chapter VI

### **Comprises, Among Other Important Matters, Pecksniffian And Architectural, And Exact Relation Of The Progress Made By Mr Pinch In The Confidence And Friendship Of The New Pupil**

It was morning; and the beautiful Aurora, of whom so much hath been written, said, and sung, did, with her rosy fingers, nip and tweak Miss Pecksniff's nose. It was the frolicsome custom of the Goddess, in her intercourse with the fair Cherry, so to do; or in more prosaic phrase, the tip of that feature in the sweet girl's countenance was always very red at breakfast-time. For the most part, indeed, it wore, at that season of the day, a scraped and frosty look, as if it had been rasped; while a similar phenomenon developed itself in her humour, which was then observed to be of a sharp and acid quality, as though an extra lemon (figuratively speaking) had been squeezed into the nectar of her disposition, and had rather damaged its flavour.

This additional pungency on the part of the fair young creature led, on ordinary occasions, to such slight consequences as the copious dilution of Mr Pinch's tea, or to his coming off uncommonly short in respect of butter, or to other the like results. But on the morning after the Installation Banquet, she suffered him to wander to and fro among the eatables and drinkables, a perfectly free and unchecked man; so utterly to Mr Pinch's wonder and confusion, that like the wretched captive who recovered his liberty in his old age, he could make but little use of his enlargement, and fell into a strange kind of flutter for want of some kind hand to scrape his bread, and cut him off in the article of sugar with a lump, and pay him those other little attentions to which he was accustomed. There was something almost awful, too, about the self-possession of the new pupil; who 'troubled' Mr Pecksniff for the loaf, and helped himself to a rasher of that gentleman's own particular and private bacon, with all the coolness in life. He even seemed to think that he was doing quite a regular thing, and to expect that Mr Pinch would follow his example, since he took occasion to observe of that young man 'that he didn't get on'; a speech of so tremendous a character, that Tom cast down his eyes involuntarily, and felt as if he himself had committed some horrible deed and heinous breach of Mr Pecksniff's confidence. Indeed, the agony of having such an indiscreet remark addressed to him before the assembled family, was breakfast enough in itself, and would, without any other matter of reflection, have settled Mr Pinch's business and quenched his appetite, for one meal, though he had been never so hungry.

The young ladies, however, and Mr Pecksniff likewise, remained in the very best of spirits in spite of these severe trials, though with something of a mysterious understanding among themselves. When

the meal was nearly over, Mr Pecksniff smilingly explained the cause of their common satisfaction.

'It is not often,' he said, 'Martin, that my daughters and I desert our quiet home to pursue the giddy round of pleasures that revolves abroad. But we think of doing so to-day.'

'Indeed, sir!' cried the new pupil.

'Yes,' said Mr Pecksniff, tapping his left hand with a letter which he held in his right. 'I have a summons here to repair to London; on professional business, my dear Martin; strictly on professional business; and I promised my girls, long ago, that whenever that happened again, they should accompany me. We shall go forth to-night by the heavy coach - like the dove of old, my dear Martin - and it will be a week before we again deposit our olive-branches in the passage. When I say olive-branches,' observed Mr Pecksniff, in explanation, 'I mean, our unpretending luggage.'

'I hope the young ladies will enjoy their trip,' said Martin.

'Oh! that I'm sure we shall!' cried Mercy, clapping her hands. 'Good gracious, Cherry, my darling, the idea of London!'

'Ardent child!' said Mr Pecksniff, gazing on her in a dreamy way. 'And yet there is a melancholy sweetness in these youthful hopes! It is pleasant to know that they never can be realised. I remember thinking once myself, in the days of my childhood, that pickled onions grew on trees, and that every elephant was born with an impregnable castle on his back. I have not found the fact to be so; far from it; and yet those visions have comforted me under circumstances of trial. Even when I have had the anguish of discovering that I have nourished in my breast on ostrich, and not a human pupil - even in that hour of agony, they have soothed me.'

At this dread allusion to John Westlock, Mr Pinch precipitately choked in his tea; for he had that very morning received a letter from him, as Mr Pecksniff very well knew.

'You will take care, my dear Martin,' said Mr Pecksniff, resuming his former cheerfulness, 'that the house does not run away in our absence. We leave you in charge of everything. There is no mystery; all is free and open. Unlike the young man in the Eastern tale - who is described as a one-eyed almanac, if I am not mistaken, Mr Pinch? - '

'A one-eyed calender, I think, sir,' faltered Tom.

'They are pretty nearly the same thing, I believe,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling compassionately; 'or they used to be in my time. Unlike that young man, my dear Martin, you are forbidden to enter no corner of this house; but are requested to make yourself perfectly at home in every part of it. You will be jovial, my dear Martin, and will kill the fatted calf if you please!'

There was not the least objection, doubtless, to the young man's slaughtering and appropriating to his own use any calf, fat or lean, that he might happen to find upon the premises; but as no such animal chanced at that time to be grazing on Mr Pecksniff's estate, this request must be considered rather as a polite compliment than a substantial hospitality. It was the finishing ornament of the conversation; for when he had delivered it, Mr Pecksniff rose and led the way to that hotbed of architectural genius, the two-pair front.

'Let me see,' he said, searching among the papers, 'how you can best employ yourself, Martin, while I am absent. Suppose you were to give me your idea of a monument to a Lord Mayor of London; or a tomb for a sheriff; or your notion of a cow-house to be erected in a nobleman's park. Do you know, now,' said Mr Pecksniff, folding his hands, and looking at his young relation with an air of pensive interest, 'that I should very much like to see your notion of a cow-house?'

But Martin by no means appeared to relish this suggestion.

'A pump,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is very chaste practice. I have found that a lamp post is calculated to refine the mind and give it a classical tendency. An ornamental turnpike has a remarkable effect upon the imagination. What do you say to beginning with an ornamental turnpike?'

'Whatever Mr Pecksniff pleased,' said Martin, doubtfully.

'Stay,' said that gentleman. 'Come! as you're ambitious, and are a very neat draughtsman, you shall - ha ha! - you shall try your hand on these proposals for a grammar-school; regulating your plan, of course, by the printed particulars. Upon my word, now,' said Mr Pecksniff, merrily, 'I shall be very curious to see what you make of the grammar-school. Who knows but a young man of your taste might hit upon something, impracticable and unlikely in itself, but which I could put into shape? For it really is, my dear Martin, it really is in the finishing touches alone, that great experience and long study in these matters tell. Ha, ha, ha! Now it really will be,' continued Mr Pecksniff, clapping his young friend on the back in his droll humour, 'an amusement to me, to see what you make of the grammar-school.'

Martin readily undertook this task, and Mr Pecksniff forthwith proceeded to entrust him with the materials necessary for its execution; dwelling meanwhile on the magical effect of a few finishing touches from the hand of a master; which, indeed, as some people said (and these were the old enemies again!) was unquestionably very surprising, and almost miraculous; as there were cases on record in which the masterly introduction of an additional back window, or a kitchen door, or half-a-dozen steps, or even a water spout, had made the design of a pupil Mr Pecksniff's own work, and had brought substantial rewards into that gentleman's pocket. But such is the magic of genius, which changes all it handles into gold!

'When your mind requires to be refreshed by change of occupation,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'Thomas Pinch will instruct you in the art of surveying the back garden, or in ascertaining the dead level of the road between this house and the finger-post, or in any other practical and pleasing pursuit. There are a cart-load of loose bricks, and a score or two of old flower-pots, in the back yard. If you could pile them up my dear Martin, into any form which would remind me on my return say of St. Peter's at Rome, or the Mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople, it would be at once improving to you and agreeable to my feelings. And now,' said Mr Pecksniff, in conclusion, 'to drop, for the present, our professional relations and advert to private matters, I shall be glad to talk with you in my own room, while I pack up my portmanteau.'

Martin attended him; and they remained in secret conference together for an hour or more; leaving Tom Pinch alone. When the young man returned, he was very taciturn and dull, in which state he remained all day; so that Tom, after trying him once or twice with indifferent conversation, felt a delicacy in obtruding himself upon his thoughts, and said no more.

He would not have had leisure to say much, had his new friend been ever so loquacious; for first of all Mr Pecksniff called him down to stand upon the top of his portmanteau and represent ancient statues there, until such time as it would consent to be locked; and then Miss Charity called him to come and cord her trunk; and then Miss Mercy sent for him to come and mend her box; and then he wrote the fullest possible cards for all the luggage; and then he volunteered to carry it all downstairs; and after that to see it safely carried on a couple of barrows to the old finger-post at the end of the lane; and then to mind it till the coach came up. In short, his day's work would have been a pretty heavy one for a porter, but his thorough good-will made nothing of it; and as he sat upon the luggage at last, waiting for the Pecksniffs, escorted by the new pupil, to come down the lane, his heart was light with the hope of having pleased his benefactor.

'I was almost afraid,' said Tom, taking a letter from his pocket and wiping his face, for he was hot with bustling about though it was a cold day, 'that I shouldn't have had time to write it, and that would have been a thousand pities; postage from such a distance being a serious consideration, when one's not rich. She will be glad to see my hand, poor girl, and to hear that Pecksniff is as kind as ever. I would have asked John Westlock to call and see her, and tell her all about me by word of mouth, but I was afraid he might speak against Pecksniff to her, and make her uneasy. Besides, they are particular people where she is, and it might have rendered her situation uncomfortable if she had had a visit from a young man like John. Poor Ruth!'

Tom Pinch seemed a little disposed to be melancholy for half a minute or so, but he found comfort very soon, and pursued his ruminations thus:

'I'm a nice man, I don't think, as John used to say (John was a kind, merry-hearted fellow; I wish he had liked Pecksniff better), to be feeling low, on account of the distance between us, when I ought to be thinking, instead, of my extraordinary good luck in having ever got here. I must have been born with a silver spoon in my mouth, I am sure, to have ever come across Pecksniff. And here have I fallen again into my usual good luck with the new pupil! Such an affable, generous, free fellow, as he is, I never saw. Why, we were companions directly! and he a relation of Pecksniff's too, and a clever, dashing youth who might cut his way through the world as if it were a cheese! Here he comes while the words are on my lips' said Tom; 'walking down the lane as if the lane belonged to him.'

In truth, the new pupil, not at all disconcerted by the honour of having Miss Mercy Pecksniff on his arm, or by the affectionate adieux of that young lady, approached as Mr Pinch spoke, followed by Miss Charity and Mr Pecksniff. As the coach appeared at the same moment, Tom lost no time in entreating the gentleman last mentioned, to undertake the delivery of his letter.

'Oh!' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing at the superscription. 'For your sister, Thomas. Yes, oh yes, it shall be delivered, Mr Pinch. Make your mind easy upon that score. She shall certainly have it, Mr Pinch.'

He made the promise with so much condescension and patronage, that Tom felt he had asked a great deal (this had not occurred to his mind before), and thanked him earnestly. The Miss Pecksniffs, according to a custom they had, were amused beyond description at the mention of Mr Pinch's sister. Oh the fright! The bare idea of a Miss Pinch! Good heavens!

Tom was greatly pleased to see them so merry, for he took it as a token of their favour, and good-humoured regard. Therefore he laughed too and rubbed his hands and wished them a pleasant journey and safe return, and was quite brisk. Even when the coach had rolled away with the olive-branches in the boot and the family of doves inside, he stood waving his hand and bowing; so much gratified by the unusually courteous demeanour of the young ladies, that he was quite regardless, for the moment, of Martin Chuzzlewit, who stood leaning thoughtfully against the finger-post, and who after disposing of his fair charge had hardly lifted his eyes from the ground.

The perfect silence which ensued upon the bustle and departure of the coach, together with the sharp air of the wintry afternoon, roused them both at the same time. They turned, as by mutual consent, and moved off arm-in-arm.

'How melancholy you are!' said Tom; 'what is the matter?'

'Nothing worth speaking of,' said Martin. 'Very little more than was the matter yesterday, and much more, I hope, than will be the matter tomorrow. I'm out of spirits, Pinch.'

'Well,' cried Tom, 'now do you know I am in capital spirits today, and scarcely ever felt more disposed to be good company. It was a very kind thing in your predecessor, John, to write to me, was it not?'

'Why, yes,' said Martin carelessly; 'I should have thought he would have had enough to do to enjoy himself, without thinking of you, Pinch.'

'Just what I felt to be so very likely,' Tom rejoined; 'but no, he keeps his word, and says, 'My dear Pinch, I often think of you,' and all sorts of kind and considerate things of that description.'

'He must be a devilish good-natured fellow,' said Martin, somewhat peevishly: 'because he can't mean that, you know.'

'I don't suppose he can, eh?' said Tom, looking wistfully in his companion's face. 'He says so to please me, you think?'

'Why, is it likely,' rejoined Martin, with greater earnestness, 'that a young man newly escaped from this kennel of a place, and fresh to all the delights of being his own master in London, can have much leisure or inclination to think favourably of anything or anybody he has left behind him here? I put it to you, Pinch, is it natural?'

After a short reflection, Mr Pinch replied, in a more subdued tone, that to be sure it was unreasonable to expect any such thing, and that he had no doubt Martin knew best.

'Of course I know best,' Martin observed.

'Yes, I feel that,' said Mr Pinch mildly. 'I said so.' And when he had made this rejoinder, they fell into a blank silence again, which lasted until they reached home; by which time it was dark.

Now, Miss Charity Pecksniff, in consideration of the inconvenience of carrying them with her in the coach, and the impossibility of preserving them by artificial means until the family's return, had set forth, in a couple of plates, the fragments of yesterday's feast. In virtue of which liberal arrangement, they had the happiness to find awaiting them in the parlour two chaotic heaps of the remains of last night's pleasure, consisting of certain filmy bits of oranges, some mummied sandwiches, various disrupted masses of the geological cake, and several entire captain's biscuits. That choice liquor in which to steep these dainties might not be wanting, the remains of the two bottles of currant wine had been poured together and corked with a curl-paper; so that every material was at hand for making quite a heavy night of it.

Martin Chuzzlewit beheld these roystering preparations with infinite contempt, and stirring the fire into a blaze (to the great destruction of Mr Pecksniff's coals), sat moodily down before it, in the most comfortable chair he could find. That he might the better squeeze himself into the small corner that was left for him, Mr Pinch took up his position on Miss Mercy Pecksniff's stool, and setting his glass down upon the hearthrug and putting his plate upon his knees, began to enjoy himself.

If Diogenes coming to life again could have rolled himself, tub and all, into Mr Pecksniff's parlour and could have seen Tom Pinch as he sat on Mercy Pecksniff's stool with his plate and glass before him he could not have faced it out, though in his surliest mood, but must have smiled good-temperedly. The perfect and entire satisfaction of Tom; his surpassing appreciation of the husky sandwiches, which crumbled in his mouth like saw-dust; the unspeakable relish with which he swallowed the thin wine by drops, and smacked his lips, as though it were so rich and generous that to lose an atom of its fruity flavour were a sin; the look with which he paused sometimes, with his glass in his hand, proposing silent toasts to himself; and the anxious shade that came upon his contented face when, after wandering round the room, exulting in its uninvaded snugness, his glance encountered the dull brow of his companion; no cynic in the world, though in his

hatred of its men a very griffin, could have withstood these things in Thomas Pinch.

Some men would have slapped him on the back, and pledged him in a bumper of the currant wine, though it had been the sharpest vinegar - aye, and liked its flavour too; some would have seized him by his honest hand, and thanked him for the lesson that his simple nature taught them. Some would have laughed with, and others would have laughed at him; of which last class was Martin Chuzzlewit, who, unable to restrain himself, at last laughed loud and long.

'That's right,' said Tom, nodding approvingly. 'Cheer up! That's capital!'

At which encouragement young Martin laughed again; and said, as soon as he had breath and gravity enough:

'I never saw such a fellow as you are, Pinch.'

'Didn't you though?' said Tom. 'Well, it's very likely you do find me strange, because I have hardly seen anything of the world, and you have seen a good deal I dare say?'

'Pretty well for my time of life,' rejoined Martin, drawing his chair still nearer to the fire, and spreading his feet out on the fender. 'Deuce take it, I must talk openly to somebody. I'll talk openly to you, Pinch.'

'Do!' said Tom. 'I shall take it as being very friendly of you,'

'I'm not in your way, am I?' inquired Martin, glancing down at Mr Pinch, who was by this time looking at the fire over his leg.

'Not at all!' cried Tom.

'You must know then, to make short of a long story,' said Martin, beginning with a kind of effort, as if the revelation were not agreeable to him; 'that I have been bred up from childhood with great expectations, and have always been taught to believe that I should be, one day, very rich. So I should have been, but for certain brief reasons which I am going to tell you, and which have led to my being disinherited.'

'By your father?' inquired Mr Pinch, with open eyes.

'By my grandfather. I have had no parents these many years. Scarcely within my remembrance.'



'Neither have I,' said Tom, touching the young man's hand with his own and timidly withdrawing it again. 'Dear me!'

'Why, as to that, you know, Pinch,' pursued the other, stirring the fire again, and speaking in his rapid, off-hand way; 'it's all very right and proper to be fond of parents when we have them, and to bear them in remembrance after they're dead, if you have ever known anything of them. But as I never did know anything about mine personally, you know, why, I can't be expected to be very sentimental about 'em. And I am not; that's the truth.'

Mr Pinch was just then looking thoughtfully at the bars. But on his companion pausing in this place, he started, and said 'Oh! of course' - and composed himself to listen again.

'In a word,' said Martin, 'I have been bred and reared all my life by this grandfather of whom I have just spoken. Now, he has a great many good points - there is no doubt about that; I'll not disguise the fact from you - but he has two very great faults, which are the staple of his bad side. In the first place, he has the most confirmed obstinacy of character you ever met with in any human creature. In the second, he is most abominably selfish.'

'Is he indeed?' cried Tom.

'In those two respects,' returned the other, 'there never was such a man. I have often heard from those who know, that they have been, time out of mind, the failings of our family; and I believe there's some truth in it. But I can't say of my own knowledge. All I have to do, you know, is to be very thankful that they haven't descended to me, and, to be very careful that I don't contract 'em.'

'To be sure,' said Mr Pinch. 'Very proper.'

'Well, sir,' resumed Martin, stirring the fire once more, and drawing his chair still closer to it, 'his selfishness makes him exacting, you see; and his obstinacy makes him resolute in his exactions. The consequence is that he has always exacted a great deal from me in the way of respect, and submission, and self-denial when his wishes were in question, and so forth. I have borne a great deal from him, because I have been under obligations to him (if one can ever be said to be under obligations to one's own grandfather), and because I have been really attached to him; but we have had a great many quarrels for all that, for I could not accommodate myself to his ways very often - not out of the least reference to myself, you understand, but because - ' he stammered here, and was rather at a loss.

Mr Pinch being about the worst man in the world to help anybody out of a difficulty of this sort, said nothing.

'Well! as you understand me,' resumed Martin, quickly, 'I needn't hunt for the precise expression I want. Now I come to the cream of my story, and the occasion of my being here. I am in love, Pinch.'

Mr Pinch looked up into his face with increased interest.

'I say I am in love. I am in love with one of the most beautiful girls the sun ever shone upon. But she is wholly and entirely dependent upon the pleasure of my grandfather; and if he were to know that she favoured my passion, she would lose her home and everything she possesses in the world. There is nothing very selfish in THAT love, I think?'

'Selfish!' cried Tom. 'You have acted nobly. To love her as I am sure you do, and yet in consideration for her state of dependence, not even to disclose - '

'What are you talking about, Pinch?' said Martin pettishly: 'don't make yourself ridiculous, my good fellow! What do you mean by not disclosing?'

'I beg your pardon,' answered Tom. 'I thought you meant that, or I wouldn't have said it.'

'If I didn't tell her I loved her, where would be the use of my being in love?' said Martin: 'unless to keep myself in a perpetual state of worry and vexation?'

'That's true,' Tom answered. 'Well! I can guess what SHE said when you told her,' he added, glancing at Martin's handsome face.

'Why, not exactly, Pinch,' he rejoined, with a slight frown; 'because she has some girlish notions about duty and gratitude, and all the rest of it, which are rather hard to fathom; but in the main you are right. Her heart was mine, I found.'

'Just what I supposed,' said Tom. 'Quite natural!' and, in his great satisfaction, he took a long sip out of his wine-glass.

'Although I had conducted myself from the first with the utmost circumspection,' pursued Martin, 'I had not managed matters so well but that my grandfather, who is full of jealousy and distrust, suspected me of loving her. He said nothing to her, but straightway attacked me in private, and charged me with designing to corrupt the fidelity to himself (there you observe his selfishness), of a young

creature whom he had trained and educated to be his only disinterested and faithful companion, when he should have disposed of me in marriage to his heart's content. Upon that, I took fire immediately, and told him that with his good leave I would dispose of myself in marriage, and would rather not be knocked down by him or any other auctioneer to any bidder whomsoever.'

Mr Pinch opened his eyes wider, and looked at the fire harder than he had done yet.

'You may be sure,' said Martin, 'that this nettled him, and that he began to be the very reverse of complimentary to myself. Interview succeeded interview; words engendered words, as they always do; and the upshot of it was, that I was to renounce her, or be renounced by him. Now you must bear in mind, Pinch, that I am not only desperately fond of her (for though she is poor, her beauty and intellect would reflect great credit on anybody, I don't care of what pretensions who might become her husband), but that a chief ingredient in my composition is a most determined - '

'Obstinacy,' suggested Tom in perfect good faith. But the suggestion was not so well received as he had expected; for the young man immediately rejoined, with some irritation,

'What a fellow you are, Pinch!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Tom, 'I thought you wanted a word.'

'I didn't want that word,' he rejoined. 'I told you obstinacy was no part of my character, did I not? I was going to say, if you had given me leave, that a chief ingredient in my composition is a most determined firmness.'

'Oh!' cried Tom, screwing up his mouth, and nodding. 'Yes, yes; I see!'

'And being firm,' pursued Martin, 'of course I was not going to yield to him, or give way by so much as the thousandth part of an inch.'

'No, no,' said Tom.

'On the contrary, the more he urged, the more I was determined to oppose him.'

'To be sure!' said Tom.

'Very well,' rejoined Martin, throwing himself back in his chair, with a careless wave of both hands, as if the subject were quite settled, and

nothing more could be said about it - 'There is an end of the matter, and here am I!'

Mr Pinch sat staring at the fire for some minutes with a puzzled look, such as he might have assumed if some uncommonly difficult conundrum had been proposed, which he found it impossible to guess. At length he said:

'Pecksniff, of course, you had known before?'

'Only by name. No, I had never seen him, for my grandfather kept not only himself but me, aloof from all his relations. But our separation took place in a town in the adjoining country. From that place I came to Salisbury, and there I saw Pecksniff's advertisement, which I answered, having always had some natural taste, I believe, in the matters to which it referred, and thinking it might suit me. As soon as I found it to be his, I was doubly bent on coming to him if possible, on account of his being - '

'Such an excellent man,' interposed Tom, rubbing his hands: 'so he is. You were quite right.'

'Why, not so much on that account, if the truth must be spoken,' returned Martin, 'as because my grandfather has an inveterate dislike to him, and after the old man's arbitrary treatment of me, I had a natural desire to run as directly counter to all his opinions as I could. Well! As I said before, here I am. My engagement with the young lady I have been telling you about is likely to be a tolerably long one; for neither her prospects nor mine are very bright; and of course I shall not think of marrying until I am well able to do so. It would never do, you know, for me to be plunging myself into poverty and shabbiness and love in one room up three pair of stairs, and all that sort of thing.'

'To say nothing of her,' remarked Tom Pinch, in a low voice.

'Exactly so,' rejoined Martin, rising to warm his back, and leaning against the chimney-piece. 'To say nothing of her. At the same time, of course it's not very hard upon her to be obliged to yield to the necessity of the case; first, because she loves me very much; and secondly, because I have sacrificed a great deal on her account, and might have done much better, you know.'

It was a very long time before Tom said 'Certainly;' so long, that he might have taken a nap in the interval, but he did say it at last.

'Now, there is one odd coincidence connected with this love-story,' said Martin, 'which brings it to an end. You remember what you told

me last night as we were coming here, about your pretty visitor in the church?'

'Surely I do,' said Tom, rising from his stool, and seating himself in the chair from which the other had lately risen, that he might see his face. 'Undoubtedly.'

'That was she.'

'I knew what you were going to say,' cried Tom, looking fixedly at him, and speaking very softly. 'You don't tell me so?'

'That was she,' repeated the young man. 'After what I have heard from Pecksniff, I have no doubt that she came and went with my grandfather. - Don't you drink too much of that sour wine, or you'll have a fit of some sort, Pinch, I see.'

'It is not very wholesome, I am afraid,' said Tom, setting down the empty glass he had for some time held. 'So that was she, was it?'

Martin nodded assent; and adding, with a restless impatience, that if he had been a few days earlier he would have seen her; and that now she might be, for anything he knew, hundreds of miles away; threw himself, after a few turns across the room, into a chair, and chafed like a spoiled child.

Tom Pinch's heart was very tender, and he could not bear to see the most indifferent person in distress; still less one who had awakened an interest in him, and who regarded him (either in fact, or as he supposed) with kindness, and in a spirit of lenient construction. Whatever his own thoughts had been a few moments before - and to judge from his face they must have been pretty serious - he dismissed them instantly, and gave his young friend the best counsel and comfort that occurred to him.

'All will be well in time,' said Tom, 'I have no doubt; and some trial and adversity just now will only serve to make you more attached to each other in better days. I have always read that the truth is so, and I have a feeling within me, which tells me how natural and right it is that it should be. That never ran smooth yet,' said Tom, with a smile which, despite the homeliness of his face, was pleasanter to see than many a proud beauty's brightest glance; 'what never ran smooth yet, can hardly be expected to change its character for us; so we must take it as we find it, and fashion it into the very best shape we can, by patience and good-humour. I have no power at all; I needn't tell you that; but I have an excellent will; and if I could ever be of use to you, in any way whatever, how very glad I should be!'

'Thank you,' said Martin, shaking his hand. 'You're a good fellow, upon my word, and speak very kindly. Of course you know,' he added, after a moment's pause, as he drew his chair towards the fire again, 'I should not hesitate to avail myself of your services if you could help me at all; but mercy on us!' - Here he rumbled his hair impatiently with his hand, and looked at Tom as if he took it rather ill that he was not somebody else - 'you might as well be a toasting-fork or a frying-pan, Pinch, for any help you can render me.'

'Except in the inclination,' said Tom, gently.

'Oh! to be sure. I meant that, of course. If inclination went for anything, I shouldn't want help. I tell you what you may do, though, if you will, and at the present moment too.'

'What is that?' demanded Tom.

'Read to me.'

'I shall be delighted,' cried Tom, catching up the candle with enthusiasm. 'Excuse my leaving you in the dark a moment, and I'll fetch a book directly. What will you like? Shakespeare?'

'Aye!' replied his friend, yawning and stretching himself. 'He'll do. I am tired with the bustle of to-day, and the novelty of everything about me; and in such a case, there's no greater luxury in the world, I think, than being read to sleep. You won't mind my going to sleep, if I can?'

'Not at all!' cried Tom.

'Then begin as soon as you like. You needn't leave off when you see me getting drowsy (unless you feel tired), for it's pleasant to wake gradually to the sounds again. Did you ever try that?'

'No, I never tried that,' said Tom.

'Well! You can, you know, one of these days when we're both in the right humour. Don't mind leaving me in the dark. Look sharp!'

Mr Pinch lost no time in moving away; and in a minute or two returned with one of the precious volumes from the shelf beside his bed. Martin had in the meantime made himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit, by constructing before the fire a temporary sofa of three chairs with Mercy's stool for a pillow, and lying down at full-length upon it.

'Don't be too loud, please,' he said to Pinch.

'No, no,' said Tom.

'You're sure you're not cold'

'Not at all!' cried Tom.

'I am quite ready, then.'

Mr Pinch accordingly, after turning over the leaves of his book with as much care as if they were living and highly cherished creatures, made his own selection, and began to read. Before he had completed fifty lines his friend was snoring.

'Poor fellow!' said Tom, softly, as he stretched out his head to peep at him over the backs of the chairs. 'He is very young to have so much trouble. How trustful and generous in him to bestow all this confidence in me. And that was she, was it?'

But suddenly remembering their compact, he took up the poem at the place where he had left off, and went on reading; always forgetting to snuff the candle, until its wick looked like a mushroom. He gradually became so much interested, that he quite forgot to replenish the fire; and was only reminded of his neglect by Martin Chuzzlewit starting up after the lapse of an hour or so, and crying with a shiver.

'Why, it's nearly out, I declare! No wonder I dreamed of being frozen. Do call for some coals. What a fellow you are, Pinch!'