

Chapter VII

IN WHICH MR CHEVY SLYME ASSERTS THE INDEPENDENCE OF HIS SPIRIT, AND THE BLUE DRAGON LOSES A LIMB

Martin began to work at the grammar-school next morning, with so much vigour and expedition, that Mr Pinch had new reason to do homage to the natural endowments of that young gentleman, and to acknowledge his infinite superiority to himself. The new pupil received Tom's compliments very graciously; and having by this time conceived a real regard for him, in his own peculiar way, predicted that they would always be the very best of friends, and that neither of them, he was certain (but particularly Tom), would ever have reason to regret the day on which they became acquainted. Mr Pinch was delighted to hear him say this, and felt so much flattered by his kind assurances of friendship and protection, that he was at a loss how to express the pleasure they afforded him. And indeed it may be observed of this friendship, such as it was, that it had within it more likely materials of endurance than many a sworn brotherhood that has been rich in promise; for so long as the one party found a pleasure in patronizing, and the other in being patronised (which was in the very essence of their respective characters), it was of all possible events among the least probable, that the twin demons, Envy and Pride, would ever arise between them. So in very many cases of friendship, or what passes for it, the old axiom is reversed, and like clings to unlike more than to like.

They were both very busy on the afternoon succeeding the family's departure - Martin with the grammar-school, and Tom in balancing certain receipts of rents, and deducting Mr Pecksniff's commission from the same; in which abstruse employment he was much distracted by a habit his new friend had of whistling aloud while he was drawing - when they were not a little startled by the unexpected obtrusion into that sanctuary of genius, of a human head which, although a shaggy and somewhat alarming head in appearance, smiled affably upon them from the doorway, in a manner that was at once waggish, conciliatory, and expressive of approbation. 'I am not industrious myself, gents both,' said the head, 'but I know how to appreciate that quality in others. I wish I may turn grey and ugly, if it isn't in my opinion, next to genius, one of the very charmingest qualities of the human mind. Upon my soul, I am grateful to my friend Pecksniff for helping me to the contemplation of such a delicious picture as you present. You remind me of Whittington, afterwards thrice Lord Mayor of London. I give you my unsullied word of honour, that you very strongly remind me of that historical character. You are a pair of Whittingtons, gents, without the cat; which is a most agreeable and blessed exception to me, for I am not attached to the feline species. My name is Tigg; how do you do?'

Martin looked to Mr Pinch for an explanation; and Tom, who had never in his life set eyes on Mr Tigg before, looked to that gentleman himself.

'Chevy Slyme?' said Mr Tigg, interrogatively, and kissing his left hand in token of friendship. 'You will understand me when I say that I am the accredited agent of Chevy Slyme; that I am the ambassador from the court of Chiv? Ha ha!'

'Heyday!' asked Martin, starting at the mention of a name he knew. 'Pray, what does he want with me?'

'If your name is Pinch' - Mr Tigg began.

'It is not' said Martin, checking himself. 'That is Mr Pinch.'

'If that is Mr Pinch,' cried Tigg, kissing his hand again, and beginning to follow his head into the room, 'he will permit me to say that I greatly esteem and respect his character, which has been most highly commended to me by my friend Pecksniff; and that I deeply appreciate his talent for the organ, notwithstanding that I do not, if I may use the expression, grind myself. If that is Mr Pinch, I will venture to express a hope that I see him well, and that he is suffering no inconvenience from the easterly wind?'

'Thank you,' said Tom. 'I am very well.'

'That is a comfort,' Mr Tigg rejoined. 'Then,' he added, shielding his lips with the palm of his hand, and applying them close to Mr Pinch's ear, 'I have come for the letter.'

'For the letter,' said Tom, aloud. 'What letter?'

'The letter,' whispered Tigg in the same cautious manner as before, 'which my friend Pecksniff addressed to Chevy Slyme, Esquire, and left with you.'

'He didn't leave any letter with me,' said Tom.

'Hush!' cried the other. 'It's all the same thing, though not so delicately done by my friend Pecksniff as I could have wished. The money.'

'The money!' cried Tom quite scared.

'Exactly so,' said Mr Tigg. With which he rapped Tom twice or thrice upon the breast and nodded several times, as though he would say that he saw they understood each other; that it was unnecessary to

mention the circumstance before a third person; and that he would take it as a particular favour if Tom would slip the amount into his hand, as quietly as possible.

Mr Pinch, however, was so very much astounded by this (to him) inexplicable deportment, that he at once openly declared there must be some mistake, and that he had been entrusted with no commission whatever having any reference to Mr Tigg or to his friend, either. Mr Tigg received this declaration with a grave request that Mr Pinch would have the goodness to make it again; and on Tom's repeating it in a still more emphatic and unmistakable manner, checked it off, sentence for sentence, by nodding his head solemnly at the end of each. When it had come to a close for the second time, Mr Tigg sat himself down in a chair and addressed the young men as follows:

'Then I tell you what it is, gents both. There is at this present moment in this very place, a perfect constellation of talent and genius, who is involved, through what I cannot but designate as the culpable negligence of my friend Pecksniff, in a situation as tremendous, perhaps, as the social intercourse of the nineteenth century will readily admit of. There is actually at this instant, at the Blue Dragon in this village - an ale-house, observe; a common, paltry, low-minded, clodhopping, pipe-smoking ale-house - an individual, of whom it may be said, in the language of the Poet, that nobody but himself can in any way come up to him; who is detained there for his bill. Ha! ha! For his bill. I repeat it - for his bill. Now,' said Mr Tigg, 'we have heard of Fox's Book of Martyrs, I believe, and we have heard of the Court of Requests, and the Star Chamber; but I fear the contradiction of no man alive or dead, when I assert that my friend Chevy Slyme being held in pawn for a bill, beats any amount of cockfighting with which I am acquainted.'

Martin and Mr Pinch looked, first at each other, and afterwards at Mr Tigg, who with his arms folded on his breast surveyed them, half in despondency and half in bitterness.

'Don't mistake me, gents both,' he said, stretching forth his right hand. 'If it had been for anything but a bill, I could have borne it, and could still have looked upon mankind with some feeling of respect; but when such a man as my friend Slyme is detained for a score - a thing in itself essentially mean; a low performance on a slate, or possibly chalked upon the back of a door - I do feel that there is a screw of such magnitude loose somewhere, that the whole framework of society is shaken, and the very first principles of things can no longer be trusted. In short, gents both,' said Mr Tigg with a passionate flourish of his hands and head, 'when a man like Slyme is detained for such a thing as a bill, I reject the superstitions of ages, and believe nothing. I don't even believe that I DON'T believe, curse me if I do!'

'I am very sorry, I am sure,' said Tom after a pause, 'but Mr Pecksniff said nothing to me about it, and I couldn't act without his instructions. Wouldn't it be better, sir, if you were to go to - to wherever you came from - yourself, and remit the money to your friend?'

'How can that be done, when I am detained also?' said Mr Tigg; 'and when moreover, owing to the astounding, and I must add, guilty negligence of my friend Pecksniff, I have no money for coach-hire?'

Tom thought of reminding the gentleman (who, no doubt, in his agitation had forgotten it) that there was a post-office in the land; and that possibly if he wrote to some friend or agent for a remittance it might not be lost upon the road; or at all events that the chance, however desperate, was worth trusting to. But, as his good-nature presently suggested to him certain reasons for abstaining from this hint, he paused again, and then asked:

'Did you say, sir, that you were detained also?'

'Come here,' said Mr Tigg, rising. 'You have no objection to my opening this window for a moment?'

'Certainly not,' said Tom.

'Very good,' said Mr Tigg, lifting the sash. 'You see a fellow down there in a red neckcloth and no waistcoat?'

'Of course I do,' cried Tom. 'That's Mark Tapley.'

'Mark Tapley is it?' said the gentleman. 'Then Mark Tapley had not only the great politeness to follow me to this house, but is waiting now, to see me home again. And for that attention, sir,' added Mr Tigg, stroking his moustache, 'I can tell you, that Mark Tapley had better in his infancy have been fed to suffocation by Mrs Tapley, than preserved to this time.'

Mr Pinch was not so dismayed by this terrible threat, but that he had voice enough to call to Mark to come in, and upstairs; a summons which he so speedily obeyed, that almost as soon as Tom and Mr Tigg had drawn in their heads and closed the window again, he, the denounced, appeared before them.

'Come here, Mark!' said Mr Pinch. 'Good gracious me! what's the matter between Mrs Lupin and this gentleman?'

'What gentleman, sir?' said Mark. 'I don't see no gentleman here sir, excepting you and the new gentleman,' to whom he made a rough

kind of bow - 'and there's nothing wrong between Mrs Lupin and either of you, Mr Pinch, I am sure.'

'Nonsense, Mark!' cried Tom. 'You see Mr - '

'Tigg,' interposed that gentleman. 'Wait a bit. I shall crush him soon. All in good time!'

'Oh HIM!' rejoined Mark, with an air of careless defiance. 'Yes, I see HIM. I could see him a little better, if he'd shave himself, and get his hair cut.'

Mr Tigg shook his head with a ferocious look, and smote himself once upon the breast.

'It's no use,' said Mark. 'If you knock ever so much in that quarter, you'll get no answer. I know better. There's nothing there but padding; and a greasy sort it is.'

'Nay, Mark,' urged Mr Pinch, interposing to prevent hostilities, 'tell me what I ask you. You're not out of temper, I hope?'

'Out of temper, sir!' cried Mark, with a grin; 'why no, sir. There's a little credit - not much - in being jolly, when such fellows as him is a-going about like roaring lions; if there is any breed of lions, at least, as is all roar and mane. What is there between him and Mrs Lupin, sir? Why, there's a score between him and Mrs Lupin. And I think Mrs Lupin lets him and his friend off very easy in not charging 'em double prices for being a disgrace to the Dragon. That's my opinion. I wouldn't have any such Peter the Wild Boy as him in my house, sir, not if I was paid race-week prices for it. He's enough to turn the very beer in the casks sour with his looks; he is! So he would, if it had judgment enough.'

'You're not answering my question, you know, Mark,' observed Mr Pinch.

'Well, sir,' said Mark, 'I don't know as there's much to answer further than that. Him and his friend goes and stops at the Moon and Stars till they've run a bill there; and then comes and stops with us and does the same. The running of bills is common enough Mr Pinch; it an't that as we object to; it's the ways of this chap. Nothing's good enough for him; all the women is dying for him he thinks, and is overpaid if he winks at 'em; and all the men was made to be ordered about by him. This not being aggravation enough, he says this morning to me, in his usual captivating way, 'We're going to-night, my man.' 'Are you, sir?' says I. 'Perhaps you'd like the bill got ready, sir?' 'Oh no, my man,' he says; 'you needn't mind that. I'll give Pecksniff

orders to see to that.' In reply to which, the Dragon makes answer, 'Thankee, sir, you're very kind to honour us so far, but as we don't know any particular good of you, and you don't travel with luggage, and Mr Pecksniff an't at home (which perhaps you mayn't happen to be aware of, sir), we should prefer something more satisfactory;' and that's where the matter stands. And I ask,' said Mr Tapley, pointing, in conclusion, to Mr Tigg, with his hat, 'any lady or gentleman, possessing ordinary strength of mind, to say whether he's a disagreeable-looking chap or not!'

'Let me inquire,' said Martin, interposing between this candid speech and the delivery of some blighting anathema by Mr Tigg, 'what the amount of this debt may be?'

'In point of money, sir, very little,' answered Mark. 'Only just turned of three pounds. But it an't that; it's the - '

'Yes, yes, you told us so before,' said Martin. 'Pinch, a word with you.'

'What is it?' asked Tom, retiring with him to a corner of the room.

'Why, simply - I am ashamed to say - that this Mr Slyme is a relation of mine, of whom I never heard anything pleasant; and that I don't want him here just now, and think he would be cheaply got rid of, perhaps, for three or four pounds. You haven't enough money to pay this bill, I suppose?'

Tom shook his head to an extent that left no doubt of his entire sincerity.

'That's unfortunate, for I am poor too; and in case you had had it, I'd have borrowed it of you. But if we told this landlady we would see her paid, I suppose that would answer the same purpose?'

'Oh dear, yes!' said Tom. 'She knows me, bless you!'

'Then let us go down at once and tell her so; for the sooner we are rid of their company the better. As you have conducted the conversation with this gentleman hitherto, perhaps you'll tell him what we purpose doing; will you?'

Mr Pinch, complying, at once imparted the intelligence to Mr Tigg, who shook him warmly by the hand in return, assuring him that his faith in anything and everything was again restored. It was not so much, he said, for the temporary relief of this assistance that he prized it, as for its vindication of the high principle that Nature's Nobs felt with Nature's Nobs, and that true greatness of soul sympathized with true greatness of soul, all the world over. It proved to him, he said, that

like him they admired genius, even when it was coupled with the alloy occasionally visible in the metal of his friend Slyme; and on behalf of that friend, he thanked them; as warmly and heartily as if the cause were his own. Being cut short in these speeches by a general move towards the stairs, he took possession at the street door of the lapel of Mr Pinch's coat, as a security against further interruption; and entertained that gentleman with some highly improving discourse until they reached the Dragon, whither they were closely followed by Mark and the new pupil.

The rosy hostess scarcely needed Mr Pinch's word as a preliminary to the release of her two visitors, of whom she was glad to be rid on any terms; indeed, their brief detention had originated mainly with Mr Tapley, who entertained a constitutional dislike to gentleman out-at-elbows who flourished on false pretences; and had conceived a particular aversion to Mr Tigg and his friend, as choice specimens of the species. The business in hand thus easily settled, Mr Pinch and Martin would have withdrawn immediately, but for the urgent entreaties of Mr Tigg that they would allow him the honour of presenting them to his friend Slyme, which were so very difficult of resistance that, yielding partly to these persuasions and partly to their own curiosity, they suffered themselves to be ushered into the presence of that distinguished gentleman.

He was brooding over the remains of yesterday's decanter of brandy, and was engaged in the thoughtful occupation of making a chain of rings on the top of the table with the wet foot of his drinking-glass. Wretched and forlorn as he looked, Mr Slyme had once been in his way, the choicest of swaggerers; putting forth his pretensions boldly, as a man of infinite taste and most undoubted promise. The stock-in-trade requisite to set up an amateur in this department of business is very slight, and easily got together; a trick of the nose and a curl of the lip sufficient to compound a tolerable sneer, being ample provision for any exigency. But, in an evil hour, this off-shoot of the Chuzzlewit trunk, being lazy, and ill qualified for any regular pursuit and having dissipated such means as he ever possessed, had formally established himself as a professor of Taste for a livelihood; and finding, too late, that something more than his old amount of qualifications was necessary to sustain him in this calling, had quickly fallen to his present level, where he retained nothing of his old self but his boastfulness and his bile, and seemed to have no existence separate or apart from his friend Tigg. And now so abject and so pitiful was he - at once so maudlin, insolent, beggarly, and proud - that even his friend and parasite, standing erect beside him, swelled into a Man by contrast.

'Chiv,' said Mr Tigg, clapping him on the back, 'my friend Pecksniff not being at home, I have arranged our trifling piece of business with Mr

Pinch and friend. Mr Pinch and friend, Mr Chevy Slyme! Chiv, Mr Pinch and friend!

'These are agreeable circumstances in which to be introduced to strangers,' said Chevy Slyme, turning his bloodshot eyes towards Tom Pinch. 'I am the most miserable man in the world, I believe!'

Tom begged he wouldn't mention it; and finding him in this condition, retired, after an awkward pause, followed by Martin. But Mr Tigg so urgently conjured them, by coughs and signs, to remain in the shadow of the door, that they stopped there.

'I swear,' cried Mr Slyme, giving the table an imbecile blow with his fist, and then feebly leaning his head upon his hand, while some drunken drops oozed from his eyes, 'that I am the wretchedest creature on record. Society is in a conspiracy against me. I'm the most literary man alive. I'm full of scholarship. I'm full of genius; I'm full of information; I'm full of novel views on every subject; yet look at my condition! I'm at this moment obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill!'

Mr Tigg replenished his friend's glass, pressed it into his hand, and nodded an intimation to the visitors that they would see him in a better aspect immediately.

'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill, eh!' repeated Mr Slyme, after a sulky application to his glass. 'Very pretty! And crowds of impostors, the while, becoming famous; men who are no more on a level with me than - Tigg, I take you to witness that I am the most persecuted hound on the face of the earth.'

With a whine, not unlike the cry of the animal he named, in its lowest state of humiliation, he raised his glass to his mouth again. He found some encouragement in it; for when he set it down he laughed scornfully. Upon that Mr Tigg gesticulated to the visitors once more, and with great expression, implying that now the time was come when they would see Chiv in his greatness.

'Ha, ha, ha,' laughed Mr Slyme. 'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill! Yet I think I've a rich uncle, Tigg, who could buy up the uncles of fifty strangers! Have I, or have I not? I come of a good family, I believe! Do I, or do I not? I'm not a man of common capacity or accomplishments, I think! Am I, or am I not?'

'You are the American aloe of the human race, my dear Chiv,' said Mr Tigg, 'which only blooms once in a hundred years!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Mr Slyme again. 'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill! I obliged to two architect's apprentices. Fellows who measure earth with iron chains, and build houses like bricklayers. Give me the names of those two apprentices. How dare they oblige me!'

Mr Tigg was quite lost in admiration of this noble trait in his friend's character; as he made known to Mr Pinch in a neat little ballet of action, spontaneously invented for the purpose.

'I'll let 'em know, and I'll let all men know,' cried Chevy Slyme, 'that I'm none of the mean, grovelling, tame characters they meet with commonly. I have an independent spirit. I have a heart that swells in my bosom. I have a soul that rises superior to base considerations.'

'Oh Chiv, Chiv,' murmured Mr Tigg, 'you have a nobly independent nature, Chiv!'

'You go and do your duty, sir,' said Mr Slyme, angrily, 'and borrow money for travelling expenses; and whoever you borrow it of, let 'em know that I possess a haughty spirit, and a proud spirit, and have infernally finely-touched chords in my nature, which won't brook patronage. Do you hear? Tell 'em I hate 'em, and that that's the way I preserve my self-respect; and tell 'em that no man ever respected himself more than I do!'

He might have added that he hated two sorts of men; all those who did him favours, and all those who were better off than himself; as in either case their position was an insult to a man of his stupendous merits. But he did not; for with the apt closing words above recited, Mr Slyme; of too haughty a stomach to work, to beg, to borrow, or to steal; yet mean enough to be worked or borrowed, begged or stolen for, by any catspaw that would serve his turn; too insolent to lick the hand that fed him in his need, yet cur enough to bite and tear it in the dark; with these apt closing words Mr Slyme fell forward with his head upon the table, and so declined into a sodden sleep.

'Was there ever,' cried Mr Tigg, joining the young men at the door, and shutting it carefully behind him, 'such an independent spirit as is possessed by that extraordinary creature? Was there ever such a Roman as our friend Chiv? Was there ever a man of such a purely classical turn of thought, and of such a toga-like simplicity of nature? Was there ever a man with such a flow of eloquence? Might he not, gents both, I ask, have sat upon a tripod in the ancient times, and prophesied to a perfectly unlimited extent, if previously supplied with gin-and-water at the public cost?'

Mr Pinch was about to contest this latter position with his usual mildness, when, observing that his companion had already gone downstairs, he prepared to follow him.

'You are not going, Mr Pinch?' said Tigg.

'Thank you,' answered Tom. 'Yes. Don't come down.'

'Do you know that I should like one little word in private with you Mr Pinch?' said Tigg, following him. 'One minute of your company in the skittle-ground would very much relieve my mind. Might I beseech that favour?'

'Oh, certainly,' replied Tom, 'if you really wish it.' So he accompanied Mr Tigg to the retreat in question; on arriving at which place that gentleman took from his hat what seemed to be the fossil remains of an antediluvian pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his eyes therewith.

'You have not beheld me this day,' said Mr Tigg, 'in a favourable light.'

'Don't mention that,' said Tom, 'I beg.'

'But you have NOT,' cried Tigg. 'I must persist in that opinion. If you could have seen me, Mr Pinch, at the head of my regiment on the coast of Africa, charging in the form of a hollow square, with the women and children and the regimental plate-chest in the centre, you would not have known me for the same man. You would have respected me, sir.'

Tom had certain ideas of his own upon the subject of glory; and consequently he was not quite so much excited by this picture as Mr Tigg could have desired.

'But no matter!' said that gentleman. 'The school-boy writing home to his parents and describing the milk-and-water, said "This is indeed weakness." I repeat that assertion in reference to myself at the present moment; and I ask your pardon. Sir, you have seen my friend Slyme?'

'No doubt,' said Mr Pinch.

'Sir, you have been impressed by my friend Slyme?'

'Not very pleasantly, I must say,' answered Tom, after a little hesitation.

'I am grieved but not surprised,' cried Mr Tigg, detaining him with both hands, 'to hear that you have come to that conclusion; for it is my own. But, Mr Pinch, though I am a rough and thoughtless man, I

can honour Mind. I honour Mind in following my friend. To you of all men, Mr Pinch, I have a right to make appeal on Mind's behalf, when it has not the art to push its fortune in the world. And so, sir - not for myself, who have no claim upon you, but for my crushed, my sensitive and independent friend, who has - I ask the loan of three half-crowns. I ask you for the loan of three half-crowns, distinctly, and without a blush. I ask it, almost as a right. And when I add that they will be returned by post, this week, I feel that you will blame me for that sordid stipulation.'

Mr Pinch took from his pocket an old-fashioned red-leather purse with a steel clasp, which had probably once belonged to his deceased grandmother. It held one half-sovereign and no more. All Tom's worldly wealth until next quarter-day.

'Stay!' cried Mr Tigg, who had watched this proceeding keenly. 'I was just about to say, that for the convenience of posting you had better make it gold. Thank you. A general direction, I suppose, to Mr Pinch at Mr Pecksniff's - will that find you?'

'That'll find me,' said Tom. 'You had better put Esquire to Mr Pecksniff's name, if you please. Direct to me, you know, at Seth Pecksniff's, Esquire.'

'At Seth Pecksniff's, Esquire,' repeated Mr Tigg, taking an exact note of it with a stump of pencil. 'We said this week, I believe?'

'Yes; or Monday will do,' observed Tom.

'No, no, I beg your pardon. Monday will NOT do,' said Mr Tigg. 'If we stipulated for this week, Saturday is the latest day. Did we stipulate for this week?'

'Since you are so particular about it,' said Tom, 'I think we did.'

Mr Tigg added this condition to his memorandum; read the entry over to himself with a severe frown; and that the transaction might be the more correct and business-like, appended his initials to the whole. That done, he assured Mr Pinch that everything was now perfectly regular; and, after squeezing his hand with great fervour, departed.

Tom entertained enough suspicion that Martin might possibly turn this interview into a jest, to render him desirous to avoid the company of that young gentleman for the present. With this view he took a few turns up and down the skittle-ground, and did not re-enter the house until Mr Tigg and his friend had quitted it, and the new pupil and Mark were watching their departure from one of the windows. 'I was just a-saying, sir, that if one could live by it,' observed Mark, pointing

after their late guests, 'that would be the sort of service for me. Waiting on such individuals as them would be better than grave-digging, sir.'

'And staying here would be better than either, Mark,' replied Tom. 'So take my advice, and continue to swim easily in smooth water.'

'It's too late to take it now, sir,' said Mark. 'I have broke it to her, sir. I am off to-morrow morning.'

'Off!' cried Mr Pinch, 'where to?'

'I shall go up to London, sir.'

'What to be?' asked Mr Pinch.

'Well! I don't know yet, sir. Nothing turned up that day I opened my mind to you, as was at all likely to suit me. All them trades I thought of was a deal too jolly; there was no credit at all to be got in any of 'em. I must look for a private service, I suppose, sir. I might be brought out strong, perhaps, in a serious family, Mr Pinch.'

'Perhaps you might come out rather too strong for a serious family's taste, Mark.'

'That's possible, sir. If I could get into a wicked family, I might do myself justice; but the difficulty is to make sure of one's ground, because a young man can't very well advertise that he wants a place, and wages an't so much an object as a wicked situation; can he, sir?'

'Why, no,' said Mr Pinch, 'I don't think he can.'

'An envious family,' pursued Mark, with a thoughtful face; 'or a quarrelsome family, or a malicious family, or even a good out-and-out mean family, would open a field of action as I might do something in. The man as would have suited me of all other men was that old gentleman as was took ill here, for he really was a trying customer. Howsoever, I must wait and see what turns up, sir; and hope for the worst.'

'You are determined to go then?' said Mr Pinch.

'My box is gone already, sir, by the waggon, and I'm going to walk on to-morrow morning, and get a lift by the day coach when it overtakes me. So I wish you good-bye, Mr Pinch - and you too, sir - and all good luck and happiness!'

They both returned his greeting laughingly, and walked home arm-in-arm. Mr Pinch imparting to his new friend, as they went, such further particulars of Mark Tapley's whimsical restlessness as the reader is already acquainted with.

In the meantime Mark, having a shrewd notion that his mistress was in very low spirits, and that he could not exactly answer for the consequences of any lengthened TETE-A-TETE in the bar, kept himself obstinately out of her way all the afternoon and evening. In this piece of generalship he was very much assisted by the great influx of company into the taproom; for the news of his intention having gone abroad, there was a perfect throng there all the evening, and much drinking of healths and clinking of mugs. At length the house was closed for the night; and there being now no help for it, Mark put the best face he could upon the matter, and walked doggedly to the bar-door.

'If I look at her,' said Mark to himself, 'I'm done. I feel that I'm a-going fast.'

'You have come at last,' said Mrs Lupin.

Aye, Mark said: There he was.

'And you are determined to leave us, Mark?' cried Mrs Lupin.

'Why, yes; I am,' said Mark; keeping his eyes hard upon the floor.

'I thought,' pursued the landlady, with a most engaging hesitation, 'that you had been - fond - of the Dragon?'

'So I am,' said Mark.

'Then,' pursued the hostess - and it really was not an unnatural inquiry - 'why do you desert it?'

But as he gave no manner of answer to this question; not even on its being repeated; Mrs Lupin put his money into his hand, and asked him - not unkindly, quite the contrary - what he would take?

It is proverbial that there are certain things which flesh and blood cannot bear. Such a question as this, propounded in such a manner, at such a time, and by such a person, proved (at least, as far as Mark's flesh and blood were concerned) to be one of them. He looked up in spite of himself directly; and having once looked up, there was no looking down again; for of all the tight, plump, buxom, bright-eyed, dimple-faced landladies that ever shone on earth, there stood before him then, bodily in that bar, the very pink and pineapple.

'Why, I tell you what,' said Mark, throwing off all his constraint in an instant and seizing the hostess round the waist - at which she was not at all alarmed, for she knew what a good young man he was - 'if I took what I liked most, I should take you. If I only thought what was best for me, I should take you. If I took what nineteen young fellows in twenty would be glad to take, and would take at any price, I should take you. Yes, I should,' cried Mr Tapley, shaking his head expressively enough, and looking (in a momentary state of forgetfulness) rather hard at the hostess's ripe lips. 'And no man wouldn't wonder if I did!'

Mrs Lupin said he amazed her. She was astonished how he could say such things. She had never thought it of him.

'Why, I never thought if of myself till now!' said Mark, raising his eyebrows with a look of the merriest possible surprise. 'I always expected we should part, and never have no explanation; I meant to do it when I come in here just now; but there's something about you, as makes a man sensible. Then let us have a word or two together; letting it be understood beforehand,' he added this in a grave tone, to prevent the possibility of any mistake, 'that I'm not a-going to make no love, you know.'

There was for just one second a shade, though not by any means a dark one, on the landlady's open brow. But it passed off instantly, in a laugh that came from her very heart.

'Oh, very good!' she said; 'if there is to be no love-making, you had better take your arm away.'

'Lord, why should I!' cried Mark. 'It's quite innocent.'

'Of course it's innocent,' returned the hostess, 'or I shouldn't allow it.'

'Very well!' said Mark. 'Then let it be.'

There was so much reason in this that the landlady laughed again, suffered it to remain, and bade him say what he had to say, and be quick about it. But he was an impudent fellow, she added.

'Ha ha! I almost think I am!' cried Mark, 'though I never thought so before. Why, I can say anything to-night!'

'Say what you're going to say if you please, and be quick,' returned the landlady, 'for I want to get to bed.'

'Why, then, my dear good soul,' said Mark, 'and a kinder woman than you are never drawed breath - let me see the man as says she did! - what would be the likely consequence of us two being - '

'Oh nonsense!' cried Mrs Lupin. 'Don't talk about that any more.'

'No, no, but it an't nonsense,' said Mark; 'and I wish you'd attend. What would be the likely consequence of us two being married? If I can't be content and comfortable in this here lively Dragon now, is it to be looked for as I should be then? By no means. Very good. Then you, even with your good humour, would be always on the fret and worrit, always uncomfortable in your own mind, always a-thinking as you was getting too old for my taste, always a-picturing me to yourself as being chained up to the Dragon door, and wanting to break away. I don't know that it would be so,' said Mark, 'but I don't know that it mightn't be. I am a roving sort of chap, I know. I'm fond of change. I'm always a-thinking that with my good health and spirits it would be more creditable in me to be jolly where there's things a-going on to make one dismal. It may be a mistake of mine you see, but nothing short of trying how it acts will set it right. Then an't it best that I should go; particular when your free way has helped me out to say all this, and we can part as good friends as we have ever been since first I entered this here noble Dragon, which,' said Mr Tapley in conclusion, 'has my good word and my good wish to the day of my death!'

The hostess sat quite silent for a little time, but she very soon put both her hands in Mark's and shook them heartily.

'For you are a good man,' she said; looking into his face with a smile, which was rather serious for her. 'And I do believe have been a better friend to me to-night than ever I have had in all my life.'

'Oh! as to that, you know,' said Mark, 'that's nonsense. But love my heart alive!' he added, looking at her in a sort of rapture, 'if you ARE that way disposed, what a lot of suitable husbands there is as you may drive distracted!'

She laughed again at this compliment; and, once more shaking him by both hands, and bidding him, if he should ever want a friend, to remember her, turned gayly from the little bar and up the Dragon staircase.

'Humming a tune as she goes,' said Mark, listening, 'in case I should think she's at all put out, and should be made down-hearted. Come, here's some credit in being jolly, at last!'

With that piece of comfort, very ruefully uttered, he went, in anything but a jolly manner, to bed.

He rose early next morning, and was a-foot soon after sunrise. But it was of no use; the whole place was up to see Mark Tapley off; the boys, the dogs, the children, the old men, the busy people and the idlers; there they were, all calling out 'Good-b'ye, Mark,' after their own manner, and all sorry he was going. Somehow he had a kind of sense that his old mistress was peeping from her chamber-window, but he couldn't make up his mind to look back.

'Good-b'ye one, good-b'ye all!' cried Mark, waving his hat on the top of his walking-stick, as he strode at a quick pace up the little street. 'Hearty chaps them wheelwrights - hurrah! Here's the butcher's dog a-coming out of the garden - down, old fellow! And Mr Pinch a-going to his organ - good-b'ye, sir! And the terrier-bitch from over the way - hie, then, lass! And children enough to hand down human natur to the latest posterity - good-b'ye, boys and girls! There's some credit in it now. I'm a-coming out strong at last. These are the circumstances that would try a ordinary mind; but I'm uncommon jolly. Not quite as jolly as I could wish to be, but very near. Good-b'ye! good-b'ye!