

## Chapter XXII

### **From Which It Will Be Seen That Martin Became A Lion Of His Own Account. Together With The Reason Why**

As soon as it was generally known in the National Hotel, that the young Englishman, Mr Chuzzlewit, had purchased a 'lo-cation' in the Valley of Eden, and intended to betake himself to that earthly Paradise by the next steamboat, he became a popular character. Why this should be, or how it had come to pass, Martin no more knew than Mrs Gamp, of Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, did; but that he was for the time being the lion, by popular election, of the Watertoast community, and that his society was in rather inconvenient request there could be no kind of doubt.

The first notification he received of this change in his position, was the following epistle, written in a thin running hand - with here and there a fat letter or two, to make the general effect more striking - on a sheet of paper, ruled with blue lines.

'NATIONAL HOTEL,

'MONDAY MORNING.

'Dear Sir - 'When I had the privillidge of being your fellow-traveller in the cars, the day before yesterday, you offered some remarks upon the subject of the tower of London, which (in common with my fellow-citizens generally) I could wish to hear repeated to a public audience.

'As secretary to the Young Men's Watertoast Association of this town, I am requested to inform you that the Society will be proud to hear you deliver a lecture upon the Tower of London, at their Hall to-morrow evening, at seven o'clock; and as a large issue of quarter-dollar tickets may be expected, your answer and consent by bearer will be considered obliging.

'Dear Sir,

'Yours truly,

'LA FAYETTE KETTLE.

'The Honourable M. Chuzzlewit.

'P.S. - The Society would not be particular in limiting you to the Tower of London. Permit me to suggest that any remarks upon the Elements of Geology, or (if more convenient) upon the Writings of your talented

and witty countryman, the honourable Mr Miller, would be well received.'

Very much aghast at this invitation, Martin wrote back, civilly declining it; and had scarcely done so, when he received another letter.

'No. 47, Bunker Hill Street,

'Monday Morning.

'(Private).

'Sir - I was raised in those interminable solitudes where our mighty Mississippi (or Father of Waters) rolls his turbid flood.

'I am young, and ardent. For there is a poetry in wildness, and every alligator basking in the slime is in himself an Epic, self-contained. I aspire for fame. It is my yearning and my thirst.

'Are you, sir, aware of any member of Congress in England, who would undertake to pay my expenses to that country, and for six months after my arrival?

'There is something within me which gives me the assurance that this enlightened patronage would not be thrown away. In literature or art; the bar, the pulpit, or the stage; in one or other, if not all, I feel that I am certain to succeed.

'If too much engaged to write to any such yourself, please let me have a list of three or four of those most likely to respond, and I will address them through the Post Office. May I also ask you to favour me with any critical observations that have ever presented themselves to your reflective faculties, on 'Cain, a Mystery,' by the Right Honourable Lord Byron?

'I am, Sir,

'Yours (forgive me if I add, soaringly),

'PUTNAM SMIF

'P.S. - Address your answer to America Junior, Messrs. Hancock & Floby, Dry Goods Store, as above.'

Both of which letters, together with Martin's reply to each, were, according to a laudable custom, much tending to the promotion of

gentlemanly feeling and social confidence, published in the next number of the Watertoast Gazette.

He had scarcely got through this correspondence when Captain Kedgick, the landlord, kindly came upstairs to see how he was getting on. The Captain sat down upon the bed before he spoke; and finding it rather hard, moved to the pillow.

'Well, sir!' said the Captain, putting his hat a little more on one side, for it was rather tight in the crown: 'You're quite a public man I calc'late.'

'So it seems,' retorted Martin, who was very tired.

'Our citizens, sir,' pursued the Captain, 'intend to pay their respects to you. You will have to hold a sort of le-vee, sir, while you're here.'

'Powers above!' cried Martin, 'I couldn't do that, my good fellow!'

'I reckon you MUST then,' said the Captain.

'Must is not a pleasant word, Captain,' urged Martin.

'Well! I didn't fix the mother language, and I can't unfix it,' said the Captain coolly; 'else I'd make it pleasant. You must re-ceive. That's all.'

'But why should I receive people who care as much for me as I care for them?' asked Martin.

'Well! because I have had a muniment put up in the bar,' returned the Captain. 'A what?' cried Martin.

'A muniment,' rejoined the Captain.

Martin looked despairingly at Mark, who informed him that the Captain meant a written notice that Mr Chuzzlewit would receive the Watertoasters that day, at and after two o'clock which was in effect then hanging in the bar, as Mark, from ocular inspection of the same, could testify.

'You wouldn't be unpop'lar, I know,' said the Captain, paring his nails. 'Our citizens an't long of riling up, I tell you; and our Gazette could flay you like a wild cat.'

Martin was going to be very wroth, but he thought better of it, and said:

'In Heaven's name let them come, then.'

'Oh, THEY'll come,' returned the Captain. 'I have seen the big room fixed a purpose, with my eyes.'

'But will you,' said Martin, seeing that the Captain was about to go; 'will you at least tell me this? What do they want to see me for? what have I done? and how do they happen to have such a sudden interest in me?'

Captain Kedgick put a thumb and three fingers to each side of the brim of his hat; lifted it a little way off his head; put it on again carefully; passed one hand all down his face, beginning at the forehead and ending at the chin; looked at Martin; then at Mark; then at Martin again; winked, and walked out.

'Upon my life, now!' said Martin, bringing his hand heavily upon the table; 'such a perfectly unaccountable fellow as that, I never saw. Mark, what do you say to this?'

'Why, sir,' returned his partner, 'my opinion is that we must have got to the MOST remarkable man in the country at last. So I hope there's an end to the breed, sir.'

Although this made Martin laugh, it couldn't keep off two o'clock. Punctually, as the hour struck, Captain Kedgick returned to hand him to the room of state; and he had no sooner got him safe there, than he bawled down the staircase to his fellow-citizens below, that Mr Chuzzlewit was 'receiving.'

Up they came with a rush. Up they came until the room was full, and, through the open door, a dismal perspective of more to come, was shown upon the stairs. One after another, one after another, dozen after dozen, score after score, more, more, more, up they came; all shaking hands with Martin. Such varieties of hands, the thick, the thin, the short, the long, the fat, the lean, the coarse, the fine; such differences of temperature, the hot, the cold, the dry, the moist, the flabby; such diversities of grasp, the tight, the loose, the short-lived, and the lingering! Still up, up, up, more, more, more; and ever and anon the Captain's voice was heard above the crowd - 'There's more below! there's more below. Now, gentlemen you that have been introduced to Mr Chuzzlewit, will you clear gentlemen? Will you clear? Will you be so good as clear, gentlemen, and make a little room for more?'

Regardless of the Captain's cries, they didn't clear at all, but stood there, bolt upright and staring. Two gentlemen connected with the Watertoast Gazette had come express to get the matter for an article

on Martin. They had agreed to divide the labour. One of them took him below the waistcoat. One above. Each stood directly in front of his subject with his head a little on one side, intent on his department. If Martin put one boot before the other, the lower gentleman was down upon him; he rubbed a pimple on his nose, and the upper gentleman booked it. He opened his mouth to speak, and the same gentleman was on one knee before him, looking in at his teeth, with the nice scrutiny of a dentist. Amateurs in the physiognomical and phrenological sciences roved about him with watchful eyes and itching fingers, and sometimes one, more daring than the rest, made a mad grasp at the back of his head, and vanished in the crowd. They had him in all points of view: in front, in profile, three-quarter face, and behind. Those who were not professional or scientific, audibly exchanged opinions on his looks. New lights shone in upon him, in respect of his nose. Contradictory rumours were abroad on the subject of his hair. And still the Captain's voice was heard - so stifled by the concourse, that he seemed to speak from underneath a feather-bed - exclaiming - 'Gentlemen, you that have been introduced to Mr Chuzzlewit, WILL you clear?'

Even when they began to clear it was no better; for then a stream of gentlemen, every one with a lady on each arm (exactly like the chorus to the National Anthem when Royalty goes in state to the play), came gliding in - every new group fresher than the last, and bent on staying to the latest moment. If they spoke to him, which was not often, they invariably asked the same questions, in the same tone; with no more remorse, or delicacy, or consideration, than if he had been a figure of stone, purchased, and paid for, and set up there for their delight. Even when, in the slow course of time, these died off, it was as bad as ever, if not worse; for then the boys grew bold, and came in as a class of themselves, and did everything that the grown-up people had done. Uncouth stragglers, too, appeared; men of a ghostly kind, who being in, didn't know how to get out again; insomuch that one silent gentleman with glazed and fishy eyes and only one button on his waistcoat (which was a very large metal one, and shone prodigiously), got behind the door, and stood there, like a clock, long after everybody else was gone.

Martin felt, from pure fatigue, and heat, and worry, as if he could have fallen on the ground and willingly remained there, if they would but have had the mercy to leave him alone. But as letters and messages, threatening his public denouncement if he didn't see the senders, poured in like hail; and as more visitors came while he took his coffee by himself; and as Mark, with all his vigilance, was unable to keep them from the door; he resolved to go to bed - not that he felt at all sure of bed being any protection, but that he might not leave a forlorn hope untried.

He had communicated this design to Mark, and was on the eve of escaping, when the door was thrown open in a great hurry, and an elderly gentleman entered; bringing with him a lady who certainly could not be considered young - that was matter of fact; and probably could not be considered handsome - but that was matter of opinion. She was very straight, very tall, and not at all flexible in face or figure. On her head she wore a great straw bonnet, with trimmings of the same, in which she looked as if she had been thatched by an unskillful labourer; and in her hand she held a most enormous fan.

'Mr Chuzzlewit, I believe?' said the gentleman.

'That is my name.'

'Sir,' said the gentleman, 'I am pressed for time.'

'Thank God!' thought Martin.

'I go back Toe my home, sir,' pursued the gentleman, 'by the return train, which starts immediate. Start is not a word you use in your country, sir.'

'Oh yes, it is,' said Martin.

'You air mistaken, sir,' returned the gentleman, with great decision: 'but we will not pursue the subject, lest it should awake your preju - dice. Sir, Mrs Hominy.'

Martin bowed.

'Mrs Hominy, sir, is the lady of Major Hominy, one of our chicest spirits; and belongs Toe one of our most aristocratic families. You air, p'raps, acquainted, sir, with Mrs Hominy's writings.'

Martin couldn't say he was.

'You have much Toe learn, and Toe enjoy, sir,' said the gentleman. 'Mrs Hominy is going Toe stay until the end of the Fall, sir, with her married daughter at the settlement of New Thermopylae, three days this side of Eden. Any attention, sir, that you can show Toe Mrs Hominy upon the journey, will be very grateful Toe the Major and our fellow-citizens. Mrs Hominy, I wish you good night, ma'am, and a pleasant pro-gress on your route!'

Martin could scarcely believe it; but he had gone, and Mrs Hominy was drinking the milk.

'A'most used-up I am, I do declare!' she observed. 'The jolting in the cars is pretty nigh as bad as if the rail was full of snags and sawyers.'

'Snags and sawyers, ma'am?' said Martin.

'Well, then, I do suppose you'll hardly realise my meaning, sir,' said Mrs Hominy. 'My! Only think! DO tell!'

It did not appear that these expressions, although they seemed to conclude with an urgent entreaty, stood in need of any answer; for Mrs Hominy, untying her bonnet-strings, observed that she would withdraw to lay that article of dress aside, and would return immediately.

'Mark!' said Martin. 'Touch me, will you. Am I awake?'

'Hominy is, sir,' returned his partner - 'Broad awake! Just the sort of woman, sir, as would be discovered with her eyes wide open, and her mind a-working for her country's good, at any hour of the day or night.'

They had no opportunity of saying more, for Mrs Hominy stalked in again - very erect, in proof of her aristocratic blood; and holding in her clasped hands a red cotton pocket-handkerchief, perhaps a parting gift from that choice spirit, the Major. She had laid aside her bonnet, and now appeared in a highly aristocratic and classical cap, meeting beneath her chin: a style of headdress so admirably adapted to her countenance, that if the late Mr Grimaldi had appeared in the lappets of Mrs Siddons, a more complete effect could not have been produced.

Martin handed her to a chair. Her first words arrested him before he could get back to his own seat.

'Pray, sir!' said Mrs Hominy, 'where do you hail from?'

'I am afraid I am dull of comprehension,' answered Martin, 'being extremely tired; but upon my word I don't understand you.'

Mrs Hominy shook her head with a melancholy smile that said, not inexpressively, 'They corrupt even the language in that old country!' and added then, as coming down a step or two to meet his low capacity, 'Where was you rose?'

'Oh!' said Martin 'I was born in Kent.'

'And how do you like our country, sir?' asked Mrs Hominy.

'Very much indeed,' said Martin, half asleep. 'At least - that is - pretty well, ma'am.'

'Most strangers - and partick'larly Britishers - are much surprised by what they see in the U-nited States,' remarked Mrs Hominy.

'They have excellent reason to be so, ma'am,' said Martin. 'I never was so much surprised in all my life.'

'Our institutions make our people smart much, sir,' Mrs Hominy remarked.

'The most short-sighted man could see that at a glance, with his naked eye,' said Martin.

Mrs Hominy was a philosopher and an authoress, and consequently had a pretty strong digestion; but this coarse, this indecorous phrase, was almost too much for her. For a gentleman sitting alone with a lady - although the door WAS open - to talk about a naked eye!

A long interval elapsed before even she - woman of masculine and towering intellect though she was - could call up fortitude enough to resume the conversation. But Mrs Hominy was a traveller. Mrs Hominy was a writer of reviews and analytical disquisitions. Mrs Hominy had had her letters from abroad, beginning 'My ever dearest blank,' and signed 'The Mother of the Modern Gracchi' (meaning the married Miss Hominy), regularly printed in a public journal, with all the indignation in capitals, and all the sarcasm in italics. Mrs Hominy had looked on foreign countries with the eye of a perfect republican hot from the model oven; and Mrs Hominy could talk (or write) about them by the hour together. So Mrs Hominy at last came down on Martin heavily, and as he was fast asleep, she had it all her own way, and bruised him to her heart's content.

It is no great matter what Mrs Hominy said, save that she had learnt it from the cant of a class, and a large class, of her fellow countrymen, who in their every word, avow themselves to be as senseless to the high principles on which America sprang, a nation, into life, as any Orson in her legislative halls. Who are no more capable of feeling, or of caring if they did feel, that by reducing their own country to the ebb of honest men's contempt, they put in hazard the rights of nations yet unborn, and very progress of the human race, than are the swine who wallow in their streets. Who think that crying out to other nations, old in their iniquity, 'We are no worse than you!' (No worse!) is high defence and 'vantage-ground enough for that Republic, but yesterday let loose upon her noble course, and but to-day so maimed and lame, so full of sores and ulcers, foul to the eye and almost hopeless to the sense, that her best friends turn from the loathsome creature with



disgust. Who, having by their ancestors declared and won their Independence, because they would not bend the knee to certain Public vices and corruptions, and would not abrogate the truth, run riot in the Bad, and turn their backs upon the Good; and lying down contented with the wretched boast that other Temples also are of glass, and stones which batter theirs may be flung back; show themselves, in that alone, as immeasurably behind the import of the trust they hold, and as unworthy to possess it as if the sordid hucksterings of all their little governments - each one a kingdom in its small depravity - were brought into a heap for evidence against them.

Martin by degrees became so far awake, that he had a sense of a terrible oppression on his mind; an imperfect dream that he had murdered a particular friend, and couldn't get rid of the body. When his eyes opened it was staring him full in the face. There was the horrible Hominy talking deep truths in a melodious snuffle, and pouring forth her mental endowments to such an extent that the Major's bitterest enemy, hearing her, would have forgiven him from the bottom of his heart. Martin might have done something desperate if the gong had not sounded for supper; but sound it did most opportunely; and having stationed Mrs Hominy at the upper end of the table he took refuge at the lower end himself; whence, after a hasty meal he stole away, while the lady was yet busied with dried beef and a saucer-full of pickled fixings.

It would be difficult to give an adequate idea of Mrs Hominy's freshness next day, or of the avidity with which she went headlong into moral philosophy at breakfast. Some little additional degree of asperity, perhaps, was visible in her features, but not more than the pickles would have naturally produced. All that day she clung to Martin. She sat beside him while he received his friends (for there was another Reception, yet more numerous than the former), propounded theories, and answered imaginary objections, so that Martin really began to think he must be dreaming, and speaking for two; she quoted interminable passages from certain essays on government, written by herself; used the Major's pocket-handkerchief as if the snuffle were a temporary malady, of which she was determined to rid herself by some means or other; and, in short, was such a remarkable companion, that Martin quite settled it between himself and his conscience, that in any new settlement it would be absolutely necessary to have such a person knocked on the head for the general peace of society.

In the meantime Mark was busy, from early in the morning until late at night, in getting on board the steamboat such provisions, tools and other necessaries, as they had been forewarned it would be wise to take. The purchase of these things, and the settlement of their bill at the National, reduced their finances to so low an ebb, that if the

captain had delayed his departure any longer, they would have been in almost as bad a plight as the unfortunate poorer emigrants, who (seduced on board by solemn advertisement) had been living on the lower deck a whole week, and exhausting their miserable stock of provisions before the voyage commenced. There they were, all huddled together with the engine and the fires. Farmers who had never seen a plough; woodmen who had never used an axe; builders who couldn't make a box; cast out of their own land, with not a hand to aid them: newly come into an unknown world, children in helplessness, but men in wants - with younger children at their backs, to live or die as it might happen!

The morning came, and they would start at noon. Noon came, and they would start at night. But nothing is eternal in this world; not even the procrastination of an American skipper; and at night all was ready.

Dispirited and weary to the last degree, but a greater lion than ever (he had done nothing all the afternoon but answer letters from strangers; half of them about nothing; half about borrowing money, and all requiring an instantaneous reply), Martin walked down to the wharf, through a concourse of people, with Mrs Hominy upon his arm; and went on board. But Mark was bent on solving the riddle of this lionship, if he could; and so, not without the risk of being left behind, ran back to the hotel.

Captain Kedgick was sitting in the colonnade, with a julep on his knee, and a cigar in his mouth. He caught Mark's eye, and said:

'Why, what the 'Tarnal brings you here?'

'I'll tell you plainly what it is, Captain,' said Mark. 'I want to ask you a question.'

'A man may ASK a question, so he may,' returned Kedgick; strongly implying that another man might not answer a question, so he mightn't.

'What have they been making so much of him for, now?' said Mark, slyly. 'Come!'

'Our people like ex-citement,' answered Kedgick, sucking his cigar.

'But how has he excited 'em?' asked Mark.

The Captain looked at him as if he were half inclined to unburden his mind of a capital joke.

'You air a-going?' he said.

'Going!' cried Mark. 'Ain't every moment precious?'

'Our people like ex-citement,' said the Captain, whispering. 'He ain't like emigrants in gin'ral; and he excited 'em along of this;' he winked and burst into a smothered laugh; 'along of this. Scadder is a smart man, and - and - nobody as goes to Eden ever comes back alive!'

The wharf was close at hand, and at that instant Mark could hear them shouting out his name; could even hear Martin calling to him to make haste, or they would be separated. It was too late to mend the matter, or put any face upon it but the best. He gave the Captain a parting benediction, and ran off like a race-horse.

'Mark! Mark!' cried Martin.

'Here am I, sir!' shouted Mark, suddenly replying from the edge of the quay, and leaping at a bound on board. 'Never was half so jolly, sir. All right. Haul in! Go ahead!'

The sparks from the wood fire streamed upward from the two chimneys, as if the vessel were a great firework just lighted; and they roared away upon the dark water.