

Chapter XXIV

Reports Progress In Certain Homely Matters Of Love, Hatred, Jealousy, And Revenge

'Hallo, Pecksniff!' cried Mr Jonas from the parlour. 'Isn't somebody a-going to open that precious old door of yours?'

'Immediately, Mr Jonas. Immediately.'

'Ecod,' muttered the orphan, 'not before it's time neither. Whoever it is, has knocked three times, and each one loud enough to wake the - ' he had such a repugnance to the idea of waking the Dead, that he stopped even then with the words upon his tongue, and said, instead, 'the Seven Sleepers.'

'Immediately, Mr Jonas; immediately,' repeated Pecksniff. 'Thomas Pinch' - he couldn't make up his mind, in his great agitation, whether to call Tom his dear friend or a villain, so he shook his fist at him PRO TEM - 'go up to my daughters' room, and tell them who is here. Say, Silence. Silence! Do you hear me, sir?'

'Directly, sir!' cried Tom, departing, in a state of much amazement, on his errand.

'You'll - ha, ha, ha! - you'll excuse me, Mr Jonas, if I close this door a moment, will you?' said Pecksniff. 'This may be a professional call. Indeed I am pretty sure it is. Thank you.' Then Mr Pecksniff, gently warbling a rustic stave, put on his garden hat, seized a spade, and opened the street door; calmly appearing on the threshold, as if he thought he had, from his vineyard, heard a modest rap, but was not quite certain.

Seeing a gentleman and lady before him, he started back in as much confusion as a good man with a crystal conscience might betray in mere surprise. Recognition came upon him the next moment, and he cried:

'Mr Chuzzlewit! Can I believe my eyes! My dear sir; my good sir! A joyful hour, a happy hour indeed. Pray, my dear sir, walk in. You find me in my garden-dress. You will excuse it, I know. It is an ancient pursuit, gardening. Primitive, my dear sir. Or, if I am not mistaken, Adam was the first of our calling. MY Eve, I grieve to say is no more, sir; but' - here he pointed to his spade, and shook his head as if he were not cheerful without an effort - 'but I do a little bit of Adam still.'

He had by this time got them into the best parlour, where the portrait by Spiller, and the bust by Spoker, were.

'My daughters,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'will be overjoyed. If I could feel weary upon such a theme, I should have been worn out long ago, my dear sir, by their constant anticipation of this happiness and their repeated allusions to our meeting at Mrs Todgers's. Their fair young friend, too,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'whom they so desire to know and love - indeed to know her, is to love - I hope I see her well. I hope in saying, 'Welcome to my humble roof!' I find some echo in her own sentiments. If features are an index to the heart, I have no fears of that. An extremely engaging expression of countenance, Mr Chuzzlewit, my dear sir - very much so!'

'Mary,' said the old man, 'Mr Pecksniff flatters you. But flattery from him is worth the having. He is not a dealer in it, and it comes from his heart. We thought Mr - '

'Pinch,' said Mary.

'Mr Pinch would have arrived before us, Pecksniff.'

'He did arrive before you, my dear sir,' retorted Pecksniff, raising his voice for the edification of Tom upon the stairs, 'and was about, I dare say, to tell me of your coming, when I begged him first to knock at my daughters' chamber, and inquire after Charity, my dear child, who is not so well as I could wish. No,' said Mr Pecksniff, answering their looks, 'I am sorry to say, she is not. It is merely an hysterical affection; nothing more, I am not uneasy. Mr Pinch! Thomas!' exclaimed Pecksniff, in his kindest accents. 'Pray come in. I shall make no stranger of you. Thomas is a friend of mine, of rather long-standing, Mr Chuzzlewit, you must know.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Tom. 'You introduce me very kindly, and speak of me in terms of which I am very proud.'

'Old Thomas!' cried his master, pleasantly 'God bless you!'

Tom reported that the young ladies would appear directly, and that the best refreshments which the house afforded were even then in preparation, under their joint superintendence. While he was speaking, the old man looked at him intently, though with less harshness than was common to him; nor did the mutual embarrassment of Tom and the young lady, to whatever cause he attributed it, seem to escape his observation.

'Pecksniff,' he said after a pause, rising and taking him aside towards the window, 'I was much shocked on hearing of my brother's death. We had been strangers for many years. My only comfort is that he must have lived the happier and better man for having associated no

hopes or schemes with me. Peace to his memory! We were play-fellows once; and it would have been better for us both if we had died then.'

Finding him in this gentle mood, Mr Pecksniff began to see another way out of his difficulties, besides the casting overboard of Jonas.

'That any man, my dear sir, could possibly be the happier for not knowing you,' he returned, 'you will excuse my doubting. But that Mr Anthony, in the evening of his life, was happier in the affection of his excellent son - a pattern, my dear sir, a pattern to all sons - and in the care of a distant relation who, however lowly in his means of serving him, had no bounds to his inclination; I can inform you.'

'How's this?' said the old man. 'You are not a legatee?'

'You don't,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a melancholy pressure of his hand, 'quite understand my nature yet, I find. No, sir, I am not a legatee. I am proud to say I am not a legatee. I am proud to say that neither of my children is a legatee. And yet, sir, I was with him at his own request. HE understood me somewhat better, sir. He wrote and said, 'I am sick. I am sinking. Come to me!' I went to him. I sat beside his bed, sir, and I stood beside his grave. Yes, at the risk of offending even you, I did it, sir. Though the avowal should lead to our instant separation, and to the severing of those tender ties between us which have recently been formed, I make it. But I am not a legatee,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling dispassionately; 'and I never expected to be a legatee. I knew better!'

'His son a pattern!' cried old Martin. 'How can you tell me that? My brother had in his wealth the usual doom of wealth, and root of misery. He carried his corrupting influence with him, go where he would; and shed it round him, even on his hearth. It made of his own child a greedy expectant, who measured every day and hour the lessening distance between his father and the grave, and cursed his tardy progress on that dismal road.'

'No!' cried Mr Pecksniff, boldly. 'Not at all, sir!'

'But I saw that shadow in his house,' said Martin Chuzzlewit, 'the last time we met, and warned him of its presence. I know it when I see it, do I not? I, who have lived within it all these years!'

'I deny it,' Mr Pecksniff answered, warmly. 'I deny it altogether. That bereaved young man is now in this house, sir, seeking in change of scene the peace of mind he has lost. Shall I be backward in doing justice to that young man, when even undertakers and coffin-makers have been moved by the conduct he has exhibited; when even mutes have spoken in his praise, and the medical man hasn't known what to

do with himself in the excitement of his feelings! There is a person of the name of Gamp, sir - Mrs Gamp - ask her. She saw Mr Jonas in a trying time. Ask HER, sir. She is respectable, but not sentimental, and will state the fact. A line addressed to Mrs Gamp, at the Bird Shop, Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, London, will meet with every attention, I have no doubt. Let her be examined, my good sir. Strike, but hear! Leap, Mr Chuzzlewit, but look! Forgive me, my dear sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking both his hands, 'if I am warm; but I am honest, and must state the truth.'

In proof of the character he gave himself, Mr Pecksniff suffered tears of honesty to ooze out of his eyes.

The old man gazed at him for a moment with a look of wonder, repeating to himself, 'Here now! In this house!' But he mastered his surprise, and said, after a pause:

'Let me see him.'

'In a friendly spirit, I hope?' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Forgive me, sir but he is in the receipt of my humble hospitality.'

'I said,' replied the old man, 'let me see him. If I were disposed to regard him in any other than a friendly spirit, I should have said keep us apart.'

'Certainly, my dear sir. So you would. You are frankness itself, I know. I will break this happiness to him,' said Mr Pecksniff, as he left the room, 'if you will excuse me for a minute - gently.'

He paved the way to the disclosure so very gently, that a quarter of an hour elapsed before he returned with Mr Jonas. In the meantime the young ladies had made their appearance, and the table had been set out for the refreshment of the travellers.

Now, however well Mr Pecksniff, in his morality, had taught Jonas the lesson of dutiful behaviour to his uncle, and however perfectly Jonas, in the cunning of his nature, had learnt it, that young man's bearing, when presented to his father's brother, was anything but manly or engaging. Perhaps, indeed, so singular a mixture of defiance and obsequiousness, of fear and hardihood, of dogged sullenness and an attempt at enraging and propitiation, never was expressed in any one human figure as in that of Jonas, when, having raised his downcast eyes to Martin's face, he let them fall again, and uneasily closing and unclosing his hands without a moment's intermission, stood swinging himself from side to side, waiting to be addressed.

'Nephew,' said the old man. 'You have been a dutiful son, I hear.'

'As dutiful as sons in general, I suppose,' returned Jonas, looking up and down once more. 'I don't brag to have been any better than other sons; but I haven't been any worse, I dare say.'

'A pattern to all sons, I am told,' said the old man, glancing towards Mr Pecksniff.

'Ecod!' said Jonas, looking up again for a moment, and shaking his head, 'I've been as good a son as ever you were a brother. It's the pot and the kettle, if you come to that.'

'You speak bitterly, in the violence of your regret,' said Martin, after a pause. 'Give me your hand.'

Jonas did so, and was almost at his ease. 'Pecksniff,' he whispered, as they drew their chairs about the table; 'I gave him as good as he brought, eh? He had better look at home, before he looks out of window, I think?'

Mr Pecksniff only answered by a nudge of the elbow, which might either be construed into an indignant remonstrance or a cordial assent; but which, in any case, was an emphatic admonition to his chosen son-in-law to be silent. He then proceeded to do the honours of the house with his accustomed ease and amiability.

But not even Mr Pecksniff's guileless merriment could set such a party at their ease, or reconcile materials so utterly discordant and conflicting as those with which he had to deal. The unspeakable jealousy and hatred which that night's explanation had sown in Charity's breast, was not to be so easily kept down; and more than once it showed itself in such intensity, as seemed to render a full disclosure of all the circumstances then and there, impossible to be avoided. The beautiful Merry, too, with all the glory of her conquest fresh upon her, so probed and lanced the rankling disappointment of her sister by her capricious airs and thousand little trials of Mr Jonas's obedience, that she almost goaded her into a fit of madness, and obliged her to retire from table in a burst of passion, hardly less vehement than that to which she had abandoned herself in the first tumult of her wrath. The constraint imposed upon the family by the presence among them for the first time of Mary Graham (for by that name old Martin Chuzzlewit had introduced her) did not at all improve this state of things; gentle and quiet though her manner was. Mr Pecksniff's situation was peculiarly trying; for, what with having constantly to keep the peace between his daughters; to maintain a reasonable show of affection and unity in his household; to curb the growing ease and gaiety of Jonas, which vented itself in sundry insolences towards Mr Pinch, and an indefinable coarseness of manner in reference to Mary (they being the two dependants); to make

no mention at all of his having perpetually to conciliate his rich old relative, and to smooth down, or explain away, some of the ten thousand bad appearances and combinations of bad appearances, by which they were surrounded on that unlucky evening - what with having to do this, and it would be difficult to sum up how much more, without the least relief or assistance from anybody, it may be easily imagined that Mr Pecksniff had in his enjoyment something more than that usual portion of alloy which is mixed up with the best of men's delights. Perhaps he had never in his life felt such relief as when old Martin, looking at his watch, announced that it was time to go.

'We have rooms,' he said, 'at the Dragon, for the present. I have a fancy for the evening walk. The nights are dark just now; perhaps Mr Pinch would not object to light us home?'

'My dear sir!' cried Pecksniff, 'I shall be delighted. Merry, my child, the lantern.'

'The lantern, if you please, my dear,' said Martin; 'but I couldn't think of taking your father out of doors to-night; and, to be brief, I won't.'

Mr Pecksniff already had his hat in his hand, but it was so emphatically said that he paused.

'I take Mr Pinch, or go alone,' said Martin. 'Which shall it be?'

'It shall be Thomas, sir,' cried Pecksniff, 'since you are so resolute upon it. Thomas, my friend, be very careful, if you please.'

Tom was in some need of this injunction, for he felt so nervous, and trembled to such a degree, that he found it difficult to hold the lantern. How much more difficult when, at the old man's bidding she drew her hand through his - Tom Pinch's - arm!

'And so, Mr Pinch,' said Martin, on the way, 'you are very comfortably situated here; are you?'

Tom answered, with even more than his usual enthusiasm, that he was under obligations to Mr Pecksniff which the devotion of a lifetime would but imperfectly repay.

'How long have you known my nephew?' asked Martin.

'Your nephew, sir?' faltered Tom.

'Mr Jonas Chuzzlewit,' said Mary.

'Oh dear, yes,' cried Tom, greatly relieved, for his mind was running upon Martin. 'Certainly. I never spoke to him before to-night, sir!'

'Perhaps half a lifetime will suffice for the acknowledgment of HIS kindness,' observed the old man.

Tom felt that this was a rebuff for him, and could not but understand it as a left-handed hit at his employer. So he was silent. Mary felt that Mr Pinch was not remarkable for presence of mind, and that he could not say too little under existing circumstances. So SHE was silent. The old man, disgusted by what in his suspicious nature he considered a shameless and fulsome puff of Mr Pecksniff, which was a part of Tom's hired service and in which he was determined to persevere, set him down at once for a deceitful, servile, miserable fawner. So HE was silent. And though they were all sufficiently uncomfortable, it is fair to say that Martin was perhaps the most so; for he had felt kindly towards Tom at first, and had been interested by his seeming simplicity.

'You're like the rest,' he thought, glancing at the face of the unconscious Tom. 'You had nearly imposed upon me, but you have lost your labour. You are too zealous a toad-eater, and betray yourself, Mr Pinch.'

During the whole remainder of the walk, not another word was spoken. First among the meetings to which Tom had long looked forward with a beating heart, it was memorable for nothing but embarrassment and confusion. They parted at the Dragon door; and sighing as he extinguished the candle in the lantern, Tom turned back again over the gloomy fields.

As he approached the first stile, which was in a lonely part, made very dark by a plantation of young firs, a man slipped past him and went on before. Coming to the stile he stopped, and took his seat upon it. Tom was rather startled, and for a moment stood still, but he stepped forward again immediately, and went close up to him.

It was Jonas; swinging his legs to and fro, sucking the head of a stick, and looking with a sneer at Tom.

'Good gracious me!' cried Tom, 'who would have thought of its being you! You followed us, then?'

'What's that to you?' said Jonas. 'Go to the devil!'

'You are not very civil, I think,' remarked Tom.

'Civil enough for YOU,' retorted Jonas. 'Who are you?'

'One who has as good a right to common consideration as another,' said Tom mildly.

'You're a liar,' said Jonas. 'You haven't a right to any consideration. You haven't a right to anything. You're a pretty sort of fellow to talk about your rights, upon my soul! Ha, ha! - Rights, too!'

'If you proceed in this way,' returned Tom, reddening, 'you will oblige me to talk about my wrongs. But I hope your joke is over.'

'It's the way with you curs,' said Mr Jonas, 'that when you know a man's in real earnest, you pretend to think he's joking, so that you may turn it off. But that won't do with me. It's too stale. Now just attend to me for a bit, Mr Pitch, or Witch, or Stitch, or whatever your name is.'

'My name is Pinch,' observed Tom. 'Have the goodness to call me by it.'

'What! You mustn't even be called out of your name, mustn't you!' cried Jonas. 'Pauper' prentices are looking up, I think. Ecod, we manage 'em a little better in the city!'

'Never mind what you do in the city,' said Tom. 'What have you got to say to me?'

'Just this, Mister Pinch,' retorted Jonas, thrusting his face so close to Tom's that Tom was obliged to retreat a step. 'I advise you to keep your own counsel, and to avoid tittle-tattle, and not to cut in where you're not wanted. I've heard something of you, my friend, and your meek ways; and I recommend you to forget 'em till I am married to one of Pecksniff's gals, and not to curry favour among my relations, but to leave the course clear. You know, when curs won't leave the course clear, they're whipped off; so this is kind advice. Do you understand? Eh? Damme, who are you,' cried Jonas, with increased contempt, 'that you should walk home with THEM, unless it was behind 'em, like any other servant out of livery?'

'Come!' cried Tom, 'I see that you had better get off the stile, and let me pursue my way home. Make room for me, if you please.'

'Don't think it!' said Jonas, spreading out his legs. 'Not till I choose. And I don't choose now. What! You're afraid of my making you split upon some of your babbling just now, are you, Sneak?'

'I am not afraid of many things, I hope,' said Tom; 'and certainly not of anything that you will do. I am not a tale-bearer, and I despise all meanness. You quite mistake me. Ah!' cried Tom, indignantly. 'Is this

manly from one in your position to one in mine? Please to make room for me to pass. The less I say, the better.'

'The less you say!' retorted Jonas, dangling his legs the more, and taking no heed of this request. 'You say very little, don't you? Ecod, I should like to know what goes on between you and a vagabond member of my family. There's very little in that too, I dare say!'

'I know no vagabond member of your family,' cried Tom, stoutly.

'You do!' said Jonas.

'I don't,' said Tom. 'Your uncle's namesake, if you mean him, is no vagabond. Any comparison between you and him' - Tom snapped his fingers at him, for he was rising fast in wrath - 'is immeasurably to your disadvantage.'

'Oh indeed!' sneered Jonas. 'And what do you think of his deary - his beggarly leavings, eh, Mister Pinch?'

'I don't mean to say another word, or stay here another instant,' replied Tom.

'As I told you before, you're a liar,' said Jonas, coolly. 'You'll stay here till I give you leave to go. Now, keep where you are, will you?'

He flourished his stick over Tom's head; but in a moment it was spinning harmlessly in the air, and Jonas himself lay sprawling in the ditch. In the momentary struggle for the stick, Tom had brought it into violent contact with his opponent's forehead; and the blood welled out profusely from a deep cut on the temple. Tom was first apprised of this by seeing that he pressed his handkerchief to the wounded part, and staggered as he rose, being stunned.

'Are you hurt?' said Tom. 'I am very sorry. Lean on me for a moment. You can do that without forgiving me, if you still bear me malice. But I don't know why; for I never offended you before we met on this spot.'

He made him no answer; not appearing at first to understand him, or even to know that he was hurt, though he several times took his handkerchief from the cut to look vacantly at the blood upon it. After one of these examinations, he looked at Tom, and then there was an expression in his features, which showed that he understood what had taken place, and would remember it.

Nothing more passed between them as they went home. Jonas kept a little in advance, and Tom Pinch sadly followed, thinking of the grief which the knowledge of this quarrel must occasion his excellent

benefactor. When Jonas knocked at the door, Tom's heart beat high; higher when Miss Mercy answered it, and seeing her wounded lover, shireked aloud; higher, when he followed them into the family parlour; higher than at any other time, when Jonas spoke.

'Don't make a noise about it,' he said. 'It's nothing worth mentioning. I didn't know the road; the night's very dark; and just as I came up with Mr Pinch' - he turned his face towards Tom, but not his eyes - 'I ran against a tree. It's only skin deep.'

'Cold water, Merry, my child!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Brown paper! Scissors! A piece of old linen! Charity, my dear, make a bandage. Bless me, Mr Jonas!'

'Oh, bother YOUR nonsense,' returned the gracious son-in-law elect. 'Be of some use if you can. If you can't, get out!'

Miss Charity, though called upon to lend her aid, sat upright in one corner, with a smile upon her face, and didn't move a finger. Though Mercy laved the wound herself; and Mr Pecksniff held the patient's head between his two hands, as if without that assistance it must inevitably come in half; and Tom Pinch, in his guilty agitation, shook a bottle of Dutch Drops until they were nothing but English Froth, and in his other hand sustained a formidable carving-knife, really intended to reduce the swelling, but apparently designed for the ruthless infliction of another wound as soon as that was dressed; Charity rendered not the least assistance, nor uttered a word. But when Mr Jonas's head was bound up, and he had gone to bed, and everybody else had retired, and the house was quiet, Mr Pinch, as he sat mournfully on his bedstead, ruminating, heard a gentle tap at his door; and opening it, saw her, to his great astonishment, standing before him with her finger on her lip.

'Mr Pinch,' she whispered. 'Dear Mr Pinch! Tell me the truth! You did that? There was some quarrel between you, and you struck him? I am sure of it!'

It was the first time she had ever spoken kindly to Tom, in all the many years they had passed together. He was stupefied with amazement.

'Was it so, or not?' she eagerly demanded.

'I was very much provoked,' said Tom.

'Then it was?' cried Charity, with sparkling eyes.

'Ye-yes. We had a struggle for the path,' said Tom. 'But I didn't mean to hurt him so much.'

'Not so much!' she repeated, clenching her hand and stamping her foot, to Tom's great wonder. 'Don't say that. It was brave of you. I honour you for it. If you should ever quarrel again, don't spare him for the world, but beat him down and set your shoe upon him. Not a word of this to anybody. Dear Mr Pinch, I am your friend from tonight. I am always your friend from this time.'

She turned her flushed face upon Tom to confirm her words by its kindling expression; and seizing his right hand, pressed it to her breast, and kissed it. And there was nothing personal in this to render it at all embarrassing, for even Tom, whose power of observation was by no means remarkable, knew from the energy with which she did it that she would have fondled any hand, no matter how bedaubed or dyed, that had broken the head of Jonas Chuzzlewit.

Tom went into his room, and went to bed, full of uncomfortable thoughts. That there should be any such tremendous division in the family as he knew must have taken place to convert Charity Pecksniff into his friend, for any reason, but, above all, for that which was clearly the real one; that Jonas, who had assailed him with such exceeding coarseness, should have been sufficiently magnanimous to keep the secret of their quarrel; and that any train of circumstances should have led to the commission of an assault and battery by Thomas Pinch upon any man calling himself the friend of Seth Pecksniff; were matters of such deep and painful cogitation that he could not close his eyes. His own violence, in particular, so preyed upon the generous mind of Tom, that coupling it with the many former occasions on which he had given Mr Pecksniff pain and anxiety (occasions of which that gentleman often reminded him), he really began to regard himself as destined by a mysterious fate to be the evil genius and bad angel of his patron. But he fell asleep at last, and dreamed - new source of waking uneasiness - that he had betrayed his trust, and run away with Mary Graham.

It must be acknowledged that, asleep or awake, Tom's position in reference to this young lady was full of uneasiness. The more he saw of her, the more he admired her beauty, her intelligence, the amiable qualities that even won on the divided house of Pecksniff, and in a few days restored, at all events, the semblance of harmony and kindness between the angry sisters. When she spoke, Tom held his breath, so eagerly he listened; when she sang, he sat like one entranced. She touched his organ, and from that bright epoch even it, the old companion of his happiest hours, incapable as he had thought of elevation, began a new and deified existence.

God's love upon thy patience, Tom! Who, that had beheld thee, for three summer weeks, poring through half the deadlong night over the jingling anatomy of that inscrutable old harpsichord in the back parlour, could have missed the entrance to thy secret heart: albeit it was dimly known to thee? Who that had seen the glow upon thy cheek when leaning down to listen, after hours of labour, for the sound of one incorrigible note, thou foundest that it had a voice at last, and wheezed out a flat something, distantly akin to what it ought to be, would not have known that it was destined for no common touch, but one that smote, though gently as an angel's hand, upon the deepest chord within thee! And if a friendly glance - aye, even though it were as guileless as thine own, Dear Tom - could have but pierced the twilight of that evening, when, in a voice well tempered to the time, sad, sweet, and low, yet hopeful, she first sang to the altered instrument, and wondered at the change; and thou, sitting apart at the open window, kept a glad silence and a swelling heart - must not that glance have read perforce the dawning of a story, Tom, that it were well for thee had never been begun!

Tom Pinch's situation was not made the less dangerous or difficult by the fact of no one word passing between them in reference to Martin. Honourably mindful of his promise, Tom gave her opportunities of all kinds. Early and late he was in the church; in her favourite walks; in the village, in the garden, in the meadows; and in any or all of these places he might have spoken freely. But no; at all such times she carefully avoided him, or never came in his way unaccompanied. It could not be that she disliked or distrusted him, for by a thousand little delicate means, too slight for any notice but his own, she singled him out when others were present, and showed herself the very soul of kindness. Could it be that she had broken with Martin, or had never returned his affection, save in his own bold and heightened fancy? Tom's cheek grew red with self-reproach as he dismissed the thought.

All this time old Martin came and went in his own strange manner, or sat among the rest absorbed within himself, and holding little intercourse with any one. Although he was unsocial, he was not willful in other things, or troublesome, or morose; being never better pleased than when they left him quite unnoticed at his book, and pursued their own amusements in his presence, unreserved. It was impossible to discern in whom he took an interest, or whether he had an interest in any of them. Unless they spoke to him directly, he never showed that he had ears or eyes for anything that passed.

One day the lively Merry, sitting with downcast eyes under a shady tree in the churchyard, whither she had retired after fatiguing herself by the imposition of sundry trials on the temper of Mr Jonas, felt that a new shadow came between her and the sun. Raising her eyes in the

expectation of seeing her betrothed, she was not a little surprised to see old Martin instead. Her surprise was not diminished when he took his seat upon the turf beside her, and opened a conversation thus:

'When are you to be married?'

'Oh! dear Mr Chuzzlewit, my goodness me! I'm sure I don't know. Not yet awhile, I hope.'

'You hope?' said the old man.

It was very gravely said, but she took it for banter, and giggled excessively.

'Come!' said the old man, with unusual kindness, 'you are young, good-looking, and I think good-natured! Frivolous you are, and love to be, undoubtedly; but you must have some heart.'

'I have not given it all away, I can tell you,' said Merry, nodding her head shrewdly, and plucking up the grass.

'Have you parted with any of it?'

She threw the grass about, and looked another way, but said nothing.

Martin repeated his question.

'Lor, my dear Mr Chuzzlewit! really you must excuse me! How very odd you are.'

'If it be odd in me to desire to know whether you love the young man whom I understand you are to marry, I AM very odd,' said Martin. 'For that is certainly my wish.' 'He's such a monster, you know,' said Merry, pouting.

'Then you don't love him?' returned the old man. 'Is that your meaning?'

'Why, my dear Mr Chuzzlewit, I'm sure I tell him a hundred times a day that I hate him. You must have heard me tell him that.'

'Often,' said Martin.

'And so I do,' cried Merry. 'I do positively.'

'Being at the same time engaged to marry him,' observed the old man.

'Oh yes,' said Merry. 'But I told the wretch - my dear Mr Chuzzlewit, I told him when he asked me - that if I ever did marry him, it should only be that I might hate and tease him all my life.'

She had a suspicion that the old man regarded Jonas with anything but favour, and intended these remarks to be extremely captivating. He did not appear, however, to regard them in that light by any means; for when he spoke again, it was in a tone of severity.

'Look about you,' he said, pointing to the graves; 'and remember that from your bridal hour to the day which sees you brought as low as these, and laid in such a bed, there will be no appeal against him. Think, and speak, and act, for once, like an accountable creature. Is any control put upon your inclinations? Are you forced into this match? Are you insidiously advised or tempted to contract it, by any one? I will not ask by whom; by any one?'

'No,' said Merry, shrugging her shoulders. 'I don't know that I am.'

'Don't know that you are! Are you?'

'No,' replied Merry. 'Nobody ever said anything to me about it. If any one had tried to make me have him, I wouldn't have had him at all.'

'I am told that he was at first supposed to be your sister's admirer,' said Martin.

'Oh, good gracious! My dear Mr Chuzzlewit, it would be very hard to make him, though he IS a monster, accountable for other people's vanity,' said Merry. 'And poor dear Cherry is the vainest darling!'

'It was her mistake, then?'

'I hope it was,' cried Merry; 'but, all along, the dear child has been so dreadfully jealous, and SO cross, that, upon my word and honour, it's impossible to please her, and it's of no use trying.'

'Not forced, persuaded, or controlled,' said Martin, thoughtfully. 'And that's true, I see. There is one chance yet. You may have lapsed into this engagement in very giddiness. It may have been the wanton act of a light head. Is that so?'

'My dear Mr Chuzzlewit,' simpered Merry, 'as to light-headedness, there never was such a feather of a head as mine. It's perfect balloon, I declare! You never DID, you know!'

He waited quietly till she had finished, and then said, steadily and slowly, and in a softened voice, as if he would still invite her confidence:

'Have you any wish - or is there anything within your breast that whispers you may form the wish, if you have time to think - to be released from this engagement?'

Again Miss Merry pouted, and looked down, and plucked the grass, and shrugged her shoulders. No. She didn't know that she had. She was pretty sure she hadn't. Quite sure, she might say. She 'didn't mind it.'

'Has it ever occurred to you,' said Martin, 'that your married life may perhaps be miserable, full of bitterness, and most unhappy?'

Merry looked down again; and now she tore the grass up by the roots.

'My dear Mr Chuzzlewit, what shocking words! Of course, I shall quarrel with him. I should quarrel with any husband. Married people always quarrel, I believe. But as to being miserable, and bitter, and all those dreadful things, you know, why I couldn't be absolutely that, unless he always had the best of it; and I mean to have the best of it myself. I always do now,' cried Merry, nodding her head and giggling very much; 'for I make a perfect slave of the creature.'

'Let it go on,' said Martin, rising. 'Let it go on! I sought to know your mind, my dear, and you have shown it me. I wish you joy. Joy!' he repeated, looking full upon her, and pointing to the wicket-gate where Jonas entered at the moment. And then, without waiting for his nephew, he passed out at another gate, and went away.

'Oh, you terrible old man!' cried the facetious Merry to herself. 'What a perfectly hideous monster to be wandering about churchyards in the broad daylight, frightening people out of their wits! Don't come here, Griffin, or I'll go away directly.'

Mr Jonas was the Griffin. He sat down upon the grass at her side, in spite of this warning, and sulkily inquired:

'What's my uncle been a-talking about?'

'About you,' rejoined Merry. 'He says you're not half good enough for me.'

'Oh, yes, I dare say! We all know that. He means to give you some present worth having, I hope. Did he say anything that looked like it?'

'THAT he didn't!' cried Merry, most decisively.

'A stingy old dog he is,' said Jonas. 'Well?'

'Griffin!' cried Miss Mercy, in counterfeit amazement; 'what are you doing, Griffin?'

'Only giving you a squeeze,' said the discomfited Jonas. 'There's no harm in that, I suppose?'

'But there is great deal of harm in it, if I don't consider it agreeable,' returned his cousin. 'Do go along, will you? You make me so hot!'

Mr Jonas withdrew his arm, and for a moment looked at her more like a murderer than a lover. But he cleared his brow by degrees, and broke silence with:

'I say, Mel!'

'What do you say, you vulgar thing - you low savage?' cried his fair betrothed.

'When is it to be? I can't afford to go on dawdling about here half my life, I needn't tell you, and Pecksniff says that father's being so lately dead makes very little odds; for we can be married as quiet as we please down here, and my being lonely is a good reason to the neighbours for taking a wife home so soon, especially one that he knew. As to crossbones (my uncle, I mean), he's sure not to put a spoke in the wheel, whatever we settle on, for he told Pecksniff only this morning, that if YOU liked it he'd nothing at all to say. So, Mel,' said Jonas, venturing on another squeeze; 'when shall it be?'

'Upon my word!' cried Merry.

'Upon my soul, if you like,' said Jonas. 'What do you say to next week, now?'

'To next week! If you had said next quarter, I should have wondered at your impudence.'

'But I didn't say next quarter,' retorted Jonas. 'I said next week.'

'Then, Griffin,' cried Miss Merry, pushing him off, and rising. 'I say no! not next week. It shan't be till I choose, and I may not choose it to be for months. There!'

He glanced up at her from the ground, almost as darkly as he had looked at Tom Pinch; but held his peace.

'No fright of a Griffin with a patch over his eye shall dictate to me or have a voice in the matter,' said Merry. 'There!'

Still Mr Jonas held his peace.

'If it's next month, that shall be the very earliest; but I won't say when it shall be till to-morrow; and if you don't like that, it shall never be at all,' said Merry; 'and if you follow me about and won't leave me alone, it shall never be at all. There! And if you don't do everything I order you to do, it shall never be at all. So don't follow me. There, Griffin!'

And with that, she skipped away, among the trees.

'Ecod, my lady!' said Jonas, looking after her, and biting a piece of straw, almost to powder; 'you'll catch it for this, when you ARE married. It's all very well now - it keeps one on, somehow, and you know it - but I'll pay you off scot and lot by-and-bye. This is a plaguey dull sort of a place for a man to be sitting by himself in. I never could abide a mouldy old churchyard.'

As he turned into the avenue himself, Miss Merry, who was far ahead, happened to look back.

'Ah!' said Jonas, with a sullen smile, and a nod that was not addressed to her. 'Make the most of it while it lasts. Get in your hay while the sun shines. Take your own way as long as it's in your power, my lady!'