

Chapter XXVIII

Mr Montague At Home. And Mr Jonas Chuzzlewit At Home

There were many powerful reasons for Jonas Chuzzlewit being strongly prepossessed in favour of the scheme which its great originator had so boldly laid open to him; but three among them stood prominently forward. Firstly, there was money to be made by it. Secondly, the money had the peculiar charm of being sagaciously obtained at other people's cost. Thirdly, it involved much outward show of homage and distinction: a board being an awful institution in its own sphere, and a director a mighty man. 'To make a swingeing profit, have a lot of chaps to order about, and get into regular good society by one and the same means, and them so easy to one's hand, ain't such a bad look-out,' thought Jonas. The latter considerations were only second to his avarice; for, conscious that there was nothing in his person, conduct, character, or accomplishments, to command respect, he was greedy of power, and was, in his heart, as much a tyrant as any laureled conqueror on record.

But he determined to proceed with cunning and caution, and to be very keen on his observation of the gentility of Mr Montague's private establishment. For it no more occurred to this shallow knave that Montague wanted him to be so, or he wouldn't have invited him while his decision was yet in abeyance, than the possibility of that genius being able to overreach him in any way, pierced through his self-deceit by the inlet of a needle's point. He had said, in the outset, that Jonas was too sharp for him; and Jonas, who would have been sharp enough to believe him in nothing else, though he had solemnly sworn it, believed him in that, instantly.

It was with a faltering hand, and yet with an imbecile attempt at a swagger, that he knocked at his new friend's door in Pall Mall when the appointed hour arrived. Mr Bailey quickly answered to the summons. He was not proud and was kindly disposed to take notice of Jonas; but Jonas had forgotten him.

'Mr Montague at home?'

'I should hope he wos at home, and waiting dinner, too,' said Bailey, with the ease of an old acquaintance. 'Will you take your hat up along with you, or leave it here?'

Mr Jonas preferred leaving it there.

'The hold name, I suppose?' said Bailey, with a grin.

Mr Jonas stared at him in mute indignation.

'What, don't you remember hold mother Todgers's?' said Mr Bailey, with his favourite action of the knees and boots. 'Don't you remember my taking your name up to the young ladies, when you came a-courting there? A reg'lar scaly old shop, warn't it? Times is changed ain't they. I say how you've growed!'

Without pausing for any acknowledgement of this compliment, he ushered the visitor upstairs, and having announced him, retired with a private wink.

The lower story of the house was occupied by a wealthy tradesman, but Mr Montague had all the upper portion, and splendid lodging it was. The room in which he received Jonas was a spacious and elegant apartment, furnished with extreme magnificence; decorated with pictures, copies from the antique in alabaster and marble, china vases, lofty mirrors, crimson hangings of the richest silk, gilded carvings, luxurious couches, glistening cabinets inlaid with precious woods; costly toys of every sort in negligent abundance. The only guests besides Jonas were the doctor, the resident Director, and two other gentlemen, whom Montague presented in due form.

'My dear friend, I am delighted to see you. Jobling you know, I believe?'

'I think so,' said the doctor pleasantly, as he stepped out of the circle to shake hands. 'I trust I have the honour. I hope so. My dear sir, I see you well. Quite well? THAT'S well!'

'Mr Wolf,' said Montague, as soon as the doctor would allow him to introduce the two others, 'Mr Chuzzlewit. Mr Pip, Mr Chuzzlewit.'

Both gentlemen were exceedingly happy to have the honour of making Mr Chuzzlewit's acquaintance. The doctor drew Jonas a little apart, and whispered behind his hand:

'Men of the world, my dear sir - men of the world. Hem! Mr Wolf - literary character - you needn't mention it - remarkably clever weekly paper - oh, remarkably clever! Mr Pip - theatrical man - capital man to know - oh, capital man!'

'Well!' said Wolf, folding his arms and resuming a conversation which the arrival of Jonas had interrupted. 'And what did Lord Nobley say to that?'

'Why,' returned Pip, with an oath. 'He didn't know what to say. Same, sir, if he wasn't as mute as a poker. But you know what a good fellow Nobley is!'

'The best fellow in the world!' cried Wolf. 'It as only last week that Nobley said to me, 'By Gad, Wolf, I've got a living to bestow, and if you had but been brought up at the University, strike me blind if I wouldn't have made a parson of you!''

'Just like him,' said Pip with another oath. 'And he'd have done it!'

'Not a doubt of it,' said Wolf. 'But you were going to tell us - '

'Oh, yes!' cried Pip. 'To be sure. So I was. At first he was dumb - sewn up, dead, sir - but after a minute he said to the Duke, 'Here's Pip. Ask Pip. Pip's our mutual friend. Ask Pip. He knows.' 'Dammel!' said the Duke, 'I appeal to Pip then. Come, Pip. Bandy or not bandy? Speak out!' 'Bandy, your Grace, by the Lord Harry!' said I. 'Ha, ha!' laughed the Duke. 'To be sure she is. Bravo, Pip. Well said Pip. I wish I may die if you're not a trump, Pip. Pop me down among your fashionable visitors whenever I'm in town, Pip.' And so I do, to this day.'

The conclusion of this story gave immense satisfaction, which was in no degree lessened by the announcement of dinner. Jonas repaired to the dining room, along with his distinguished host, and took his seat at the board between that individual and his friend the doctor. The rest fell into their places like men who were well accustomed to the house; and dinner was done full justice to, by all parties.

It was a good a one as money (or credit, no matter which) could produce. The dishes, wines, and fruits were of the choicest kind. Everything was elegantly served. The plate was gorgeous. Mr Jonas was in the midst of a calculation of the value of this item alone, when his host disturbed him.

'A glass of wine?'

'Oh!' said Jonas, who had had several glasses already. 'As much of that as you like! It's too good to refuse.'

'Well said, Mr Chuzzlewit!' cried Wolf.

'Tom Gag, upon my soul!' said Pip.

'Positively, you know, that's - ha, ha, ha!' observed the doctor, laying down his knife and fork for one instant, and then going to work again, pell-mell - 'that's epigrammatic; quite!'

'You're tolerably comfortable, I hope?' said Tigg, apart to Jonas.

'Oh! You needn't trouble your head about ME,' he replied, 'Famous!'

'I thought it best not to have a party,' said Tigg. 'You feel that?'

'Why, what do you call this?' retorted Jonas. 'You don't mean to say you do this every day, do you?'

'My dear fellow,' said Montague, shrugging his shoulders, 'every day of my life, when I dine at home. This is my common style. It was of no use having anything uncommon for you. You'd have seen through it. 'You'll have a party?' said Crimple. 'No, I won't,' I said, 'he shall take us in the rough!'

'And pretty smooth, too, ecod!' said Jonas, glancing round the table. 'This don't cost a trifle.'

'Why, to be candid with you, it does not,' returned the other. 'But I like this sort of thing. It's the way I spend my money.'

Jonas thrust his tongue into his cheek, and said, 'Was it?'

'When you join us, you won't get rid of your share of the profits in the same way?' said Tigg.

'Quite different,' retorted Jonas.

'Well, and you're right,' said Tigg, with friendly candour. 'You needn't. It's not necessary. One of a Company must do it to hold the connection together; but, as I take a pleasure in it, that's my department. You don't mind dining expensively at another man's expense, I hope?'

'Not a bit,' said Jonas.

'Then I hope you'll often dine with me?'

'Ah!' said Jonas, 'I don't mind. On the contrary.'

'And I'll never attempt to talk business to you over wine, I take my oath,' said Tigg. 'Oh deep, deep, deep of you this morning! I must tell 'em that. They're the very men to enjoy it. Pip, my good fellow, I've a splendid little trait to tell you of my friend Chuzzlewit who is the deepest dog I know; I give you my sacred word of honour he is the deepest dog I know, Pip!'

Pip swore a frightful oath that he was sure of it already; and the anecdote, being told, was received with loud applause, as an incontestable proof of Mr Jonas's greatness. Pip, in a natural spirit of emulation, then related some instances of his own depth; and Wolf not to be left behind-hand, recited the leading points of one or two

vastly humorous articles he was then preparing. These lucubrations being of what he called 'a warm complexion,' were highly approved; and all the company agreed that they were full of point.

'Men of the world, my dear sir,' Jobling whispered to Jonas; 'thorough men of the world! To a professional person like myself it's quite refreshing to come into this kind of society. It's not only agreeable - and nothing CAN be more agreeable - but it's philosophically improving. It's character, my dear sir; character!'

It is so pleasant to find real merit appreciated, whatever its particular walk in life may be, that the general harmony of the company was doubtless much promoted by their knowing that the two men of the world were held in great esteem by the upper classes of society, and by the gallant defenders of their country in the army and navy, but particularly the former. The least of their stories had a colonel in it; lords were as plentiful as oaths; and even the Blood Royal ran in the muddy channel of their personal recollections.

'Mr Chuzzlewit didn't know him, I'm afraid,' said Wolf, in reference to a certain personage of illustrious descent, who had previously figured in a reminiscence.

'No,' said Tigg. 'But we must bring him into contact with this sort of fellows.'

'He was very fond of literature,' observed Wolf.

'Was he?' said Tigg.

'Oh, yes; he took my paper regularly for many years. Do you know he said some good things now and then? He asked a certain Viscount, who's a friend of mine - Pip knows him - 'What's the editor's name, what's the editor's name?' 'Wolf.' 'Wolf, eh? Sharp biter, Wolf. We must keep the Wolf from the door, as the proverb says.' It was very well. And being complimentary, I printed it.'

'But the Viscount's the boy!' cried Pip, who invented a new oath for the introduction of everything he said. 'The Viscount's the boy! He came into our place one night to take Her home; rather slued, but not much; and said, 'Where's Pip? I want to see Pip. Produce Pip!' - 'What's the row, my lord?' - 'Shakspeare's an infernal humbug, Pip! What's the good of Shakspeare, Pip? I never read him. What the devil is it all about, Pip? There's a lot of feet in Shakspeare's verse, but there an't any legs worth mentioning in Shakspeare's plays, are there, Pip? Juliet, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, and all the rest of 'em, whatever their names are, might as well have no legs at all, for anything the audience know about it, Pip. Why, in that respect they're

all Miss Biffins to the audience, Pip. I'll tell you what it is. What the people call dramatic poetry is a collection of sermons. Do I go to the theatre to be lectured? No, Pip. If I wanted that, I'd go to church. What's the legitimate object of the drama, Pip? Human nature. What are legs? Human nature. Then let us have plenty of leg pieces, Pip, and I'll stand by you, my buck!' and I am proud to say,' added Pip, 'that he DID stand by me, handsomely.'

The conversation now becoming general, Mr Jonas's opinion was requested on this subject; and as it was in full accordance with the sentiments of Mr Pip, that gentleman was extremely gratified. Indeed, both himself and Wolf had so much in common with Jonas, that they became very amicable; and between their increasing friendship and the fumes of wine, Jonas grew talkative.

It does not follow in the case of such a person that the more talkative he becomes, the more agreeable he is; on the contrary, his merits show to most advantage, perhaps, in silence. Having no means, as he thought, of putting himself on an equality with the rest, but by the assertion of that depth and sharpness on which he had been complimented, Jonas exhibited that faculty to the utmost; and was so deep and sharp that he lost himself in his own profundity, and cut his fingers with his own edge-tools.

It was especially in his way and character to exhibit his quality at his entertainer's expense; and while he drank of his sparkling wines, and partook of his monstrous profusion, to ridicule the extravagance which had set such costly fare before him. Even at such a wanton board, and in such more than doubtful company, this might have proved a disagreeable experiment, but that Tigg and Crimple, studying to understand their man thoroughly, gave him what license he chose: knowing that the more he took, the better for their purpose. And thus while the blundering cheat - gull that he was, for all his cunning - thought himself rolled up hedgehog fashion, with his sharpest points towards them, he was, in fact, betraying all his vulnerable parts to their unwinking watchfulness.

Whether the two gentlemen who contributed so much to the doctor's philosophical knowledge (by the way, the doctor slipped off quietly, after swallowing his usual amount of wine) had had their cue distinctly from the host, or took it from what they saw and heard, they acted their parts very well. They solicited the honour of Jonas's better acquaintance; trusted that they would have the pleasure of introducing him into that elevated society in which he was so well qualified to shine; and informed him, in the most friendly manner that the advantages of their respective establishments were entirely at his control. In a word, they said 'Be one of us!' And Jonas said he was infinitely obliged to them, and he would be; adding within himself,

that so long as they 'stood treat,' there was nothing he would like better.

After coffee, which was served in the drawing-room, there was a short interval (mainly sustained by Pip and Wolf) of conversation; rather highly spiced and strongly seasoned. When it flagged, Jonas took it up and showed considerable humour in appraising the furniture; inquiring whether such an article was paid for; what it had originally cost, and the like. In all of this, he was, as he considered, desperately hard on Montague, and very demonstrative of his own brilliant parts.

Some Champagne Punch gave a new though temporary fillip to the entertainments of the evening. For after leading to some noisy proceedings, which were not intelligible, it ended in the unsteady departure of the two gentlemen of the world, and the slumber of Mr Jonas upon one of the sofas.

As he could not be made to understand where he was, Mr Bailey received orders to call a hackney-coach, and take him home; which that young gentleman roused himself from an uneasy sleep in the hall to do. It being now almost three o'clock in the morning.

'Is he hooked, do you think?' whispered Crimple, as himself and partner stood in a distant part of the room observing him as he lay.

'Aye!' said Tigg, in the same tone. 'With a strong iron, perhaps. Has Nadgett been here to-night?'

'Yes. I went out to him. Hearing you had company, he went away.'

'Why did he do that?'

'He said he would come back early in the morning, before you were out of bed.'

'Tell them to be sure and send him up to my bedside. Hush! Here's the boy! Now Mr Bailey, take this gentleman home, and see him safely in. Hallo, here! Why Chuzzlewit, halloa!'

They got him upright with some difficulty, and assisted him downstairs, where they put his hat upon his head, and tumbled him into the coach. Mr Bailey, having shut him in, mounted the box beside the coachman, and smoked his cigar with an air of particular satisfaction; the undertaking in which he was engaged having a free and sporting character about it, which was quite congenial to his taste.

Arriving in due time at the house in the City, Mr Bailey jumped down, and expressed the lively nature of his feelings in a knock the like of which had probably not been heard in that quarter since the great fire of London. Going out into the road to observe the effect of this feat, he saw that a dim light, previously visible at an upper window, had been already removed and was travelling downstairs. To obtain a foreknowledge of the bearer of this taper, Mr Bailey skipped back to the door again, and put his eye to the keyhole.

It was the merry one herself. But sadly, strangely altered! So careworn and dejected, so faltering and full of fear; so fallen, humbled, broken; that to have seen her quiet in her coffin would have been a less surprise.

She set the light upon a bracket in the hall, and laid her hand upon her heart; upon her eyes; upon her burning head. Then she came on towards the door with such a wild and hurried step that Mr Bailey lost his self-possession, and still had his eye where the keyhole had been, when she opened it.

'Aha!' said Mr Bailey, with an effort. 'There you are, are you? What's the matter? Ain't you well, though?'

In the midst of her astonishment as she recognized him in his altered dress, so much of her old smile came back to her face that Bailey was glad. But next moment he was sorry again, for he saw tears standing in her poor dim eyes.

'Don't be frightened,' said Bailey. 'There ain't nothing the matter. I've brought home Mr Chuzzlewit. He ain't ill. He's only a little swipecy, you know.' Mr Bailey reeled in his boots, to express intoxication.

'Have you come from Mrs Todgers's?' asked Merry, trembling.

'Todgers's, bless you! No!' cried Mr Bailey. 'I haven't got nothin, to do with Todgers's. I cut that connection long ago. He's been a-dining with my governor at the west-end. Didn't you know he was a-coming to see us?'

'No,' she said, faintly.

'Oh yes! We're heavy swells too, and so I tell you. Don't you come out, a-catching cold in your head. I'll wake him!' Mr Bailey expressing in his demeanour a perfect confidence that he could carry him in with ease, if necessary, opened the coach door, let down the steps, and giving Jonas a shake, cried 'We've got home, my flower! Tumble up, then!'

He was so far recovered as to be able to respond to this appeal, and to come stumbling out of the coach in a heap, to the great hazard of Mr Bailey's person. When he got upon the pavement, Mr Bailey first butted at him in front, and then dexterously propped him up behind; and having steadied him by these means, he assisted him into the house.

'You go up first with the light,' said Bailey to Mr Jonas, 'and we'll foller. Don't tremble so. He won't hurt you. When I've had a drop too much, I'm full of good natur myself.'

She went on before; and her husband and Bailey, by dint of tumbling over each other, and knocking themselves about, got at last into the sitting-room above stairs, where Jonas staggered into a seat.

'There!' said Mr Bailey. 'He's all right now. You ain't got nothing to cry for, bless you! He's righter than a trivet!'

The ill-favoured brute, with dress awry, and sodden face, and rumpled hair, sat blinking and drooping, and rolling his idiotic eyes about, until, becoming conscious by degrees, he recognized his wife, and shook his fist at her.

'Ah!' cried Mr Bailey, squaring his arms with a sudden emotion. 'What, you're wicious, are you? Would you though! You'd better not!'

'Pray, go away!' said Merry. 'Bailey, my good boy, go home. Jonas!' she said; timidly laying her hand upon his shoulder, and bending her head down over him. 'Jonas!'

'Look at her!' cried Jonas, pushing her off with his extended arm. 'Look here! Look at her! Here's a bargain for a man!'

'Dear Jonas!'

'Dear Devil!' he replied, with a fierce gesture. 'You're a pretty clog to be tied to a man for life, you mewling, white-faced cat! Get out of my sight!'

'I know you don't mean it, Jonas. You wouldn't say it if you were sober.'

With affected gayety she gave Bailey a piece of money, and again implored him to be gone. Her entreaty was so earnest, that the boy had not the heart to stay there. But he stopped at the bottom of the stairs, and listened.

'I wouldn't say it if I was sober!' retorted Jonas. 'You know better. Have I never said it when I was sober?'

'Often, indeed!' she answered through her tears.

'Hark ye!' cried Jonas, stamping his foot upon the ground. 'You made me bear your pretty humours once, and ecod I'll make you bear mine now. I always promised myself I would. I married you that I might. I'll know who's master, and who's slave!'

'Heaven knows I am obedient!' said the sobbing girl. 'Much more so than I ever thought to be!'

Jonas laughed in his drunken exultation. 'What! you're finding it out, are you! Patience, and you will in time! Griffins have claws, my girl. There's not a pretty slight you ever put upon me, nor a pretty trick you ever played me, nor a pretty insolence you ever showed me, that I won't pay back a hundred-fold. What else did I marry you for? YOU, too!' he said, with coarse contempt.

It might have softened him - indeed it might - to hear her turn a little fragment of a song he used to say he liked; trying, with a heart so full, to win him back.

'Oho!' he said, 'you're deaf, are you? You don't hear me, eh? So much the better for you. I hate you. I hate myself, for having, been fool enough to strap a pack upon my back for the pleasure of treading on it whenever I choose. Why, things have opened to me, now, so that I might marry almost where I liked. But I wouldn't; I'd keep single. I ought to be single, among the friends I know. Instead of that, here I am, tied like a log to you. Pah! Why do you show your pale face when I come home? Am I never to forget you?'

'How late it is!' she said cheerfully, opening the shutter after an interval of silence. 'Broad day, Jonas!'

'Broad day or black night, what do I care!' was the kind rejoinder.

'The night passed quickly, too. I don't mind sitting up, at all.'

'Sit up for me again, if you dare!' growled Jonas.

'I was reading,' she proceeded, 'all night long. I began when you went out, and read till you came home again. The strangest story, Jonas! And true, the book says. I'll tell it you to-morrow.'

'True, was it?' said Jonas, doggedly.

'So the book says.'

'Was there anything in it, about a man's being determined to conquer his wife, break her spirit, bend her temper, crush all her humours like so many nut-shells - kill her, for aught I know?' said Jonas.

'No. Not a word,' she answered quickly.

'Oh!' he returned. 'That'll be a true story though, before long; for all the book says nothing about it. It's a lying book, I see. A fit book for a lying reader. But you're deaf. I forgot that.'

There was another interval of silence; and the boy was stealing away, when he heard her footstep on the floor, and stopped. She went up to him, as it seemed, and spoke lovingly; saying that she would defer to him in everything and would consult his wishes and obey them, and they might be very happy if he would be gentle with her. He answered with an imprecation, and -

Not with a blow? Yes. Stern truth against the base-souled villain; with a blow.

No angry cries; no loud reproaches. Even her weeping and her sobs were stifled by her clinging round him. She only said, repeating it in agony of heart, how could he, could he, could he - and lost utterance in tears.

Oh woman, God beloved in old Jerusalem! The best among us need deal lightly with thy faults, if only for the punishment thy nature will endure, in bearing heavy evidence against us, on the Day of Judgment!