

CHAPTER XL

THE PINCHES MAKE A NEW ACQUAINTANCE, AND HAVE FRESH OCCASION FOR SURPRISE AND WONDER

There was a ghostly air about these uninhabited chambers in the Temple, and attending every circumstance of Tom's employment there, which had a strange charm in it. Every morning when he shut his door at Islington, he turned his face towards an atmosphere of unaccountable fascination, as surely as he turned it to the London smoke; and from that moment it thickened round and round him all day long, until the time arrived for going home again, and leaving it, like a motionless cloud, behind.

It seemed to Tom, every morning, that he approached this ghostly mist, and became enveloped in it, by the easiest succession of degrees imaginable. Passing from the roar and rattle of the streets into the quiet court-yards of the Temple, was the first preparation. Every echo of his footsteps sounded to him like a sound from the old walls and pavements, wanting language to relate the histories of the dim, dismal rooms; to tell him what lost documents were decaying in forgotten corners of the shut-up cellars, from whose lattices such mouldy sighs came breathing forth as he went past; to whisper of dark bins of rare old wine, bricked up in vaults among the old foundations of the Halls; or mutter in a lower tone yet darker legends of the cross-legged knights, whose marble effigies were in the church. With the first planting of his foot upon the staircase of his dusty office, all these mysteries increased; until, ascending step by step, as Tom ascended, they attained their full growth in the solitary labours of the day.

Every day brought one recurring, never-failing source of speculation. This employer; would he come to-day, and what would he be like? For Tom could not stop short at Mr Fips; he quite believed that Mr Fips had spoken truly, when he said he acted for another; and what manner of man that other was, became a full-blown flower of wonder in the garden of Tom's fancy, which never faded or got trodden down.

At one time, he conceived that Mr Pecksniff, repenting of his falsehood, might, by exertion of his influence with some third person have devised these means of giving him employment. He found this idea so insupportable after what had taken place between that good man and himself, that he confided it to John Westlock on the very same day; informing John that he would rather ply for hire as a porter, than fall so low in his own esteem as to accept the smallest obligation from the hands of Mr Pecksniff. But John assured him that he (Tom Pinch) was far from doing justice to the character of Mr Pecksniff yet, if he supposed that gentleman capable of performing a generous action; and that he might make his mind quite easy on that

head until he saw the sun turn green and the moon black, and at the same time distinctly perceived with the naked eye, twelve first-rate comets careering round those planets. In which unusual state of things, he said (and not before), it might become not absolutely lunatic to suspect Mr Pecksniff of anything so monstrous. In short he laughed the idea down completely; and Tom, abandoning it, was thrown upon his beam-ends again, for some other solution.

In the meantime Tom attended to his duties daily, and made considerable progress with the books; which were already reduced to some sort of order, and made a great appearance in his fairly-written catalogue. During his business hours, he indulged himself occasionally with snatches of reading; which were often, indeed, a necessary part of his pursuit; and as he usually made bold to carry one of these goblin volumes home at night (always bringing it back again next morning, in case his strange employer should appear and ask what had become of it), he led a happy, quiet, studious kind of life, after his own heart.

But though the books were never so interesting, and never so full of novelty to Tom, they could not so enchain him, in those mysterious chambers, as to render him unconscious, for a moment, of the lightest sound. Any footstep on the flags without set him listening attentively and when it turned into that house, and came up, up, up the stairs, he always thought with a beating heart, 'Now I am coming face to face with him at last!' But no footstep ever passed the floor immediately below: except his own.

This mystery and loneliness engendered fancies in Tom's mind, the folly of which his common sense could readily discover, but which his common sense was quite unable to keep away, notwithstanding; that quality being with most of us, in such a case, like the old French Police - quick at detection, but very weak as a preventive power. Misgivings, undefined, absurd, inexplicable, that there was some one hiding in the inner room - walking softly overhead, peeping in through the door-chink, doing something stealthy, anywhere where he was not - came over him a hundred times a day, making it pleasant to throw up the sash, and hold communication even with the sparrows who had built in the roof and water-spout, and were twittering about the windows all day long.

He sat with the outer door wide open, at all times, that he might hear the footsteps as they entered, and turned off into the chambers on the lower floor. He formed odd prepossessions too, regarding strangers in the streets; and would say within himself of such or such a man, who struck him as having anything uncommon in his dress or aspect, 'I shouldn't wonder, now, if that were he!' But it never was. And though he actually turned back and followed more than one of these

suspected individuals, in a singular belief that they were going to the place he was then upon his way from, he never got any other satisfaction by it, than the satisfaction of knowing it was not the case.

Mr Fips, of Austin Friars, rather deepened than illumined the obscurity of his position; for on the first occasion of Tom's waiting on him to receive his weekly pay, he said:

'Oh! by the bye, Mr Pinch, you needn't mention it, if you please!'

Tom thought he was going to tell him a secret; so he said that he wouldn't on any account, and that Mr Fips might entirely depend upon him. But as Mr Fips said 'Very good,' in reply, and nothing more, Tom prompted him:

'Not on any account,' repeated Tom.

Mr Fips repeated: 'Very good.'

'You were going to say' - Tom hinted.

'Oh dear no!' cried Fips. 'Not at all.' However, seeing Tom confused, he added, 'I mean that you needn't mention any particulars about your place of employment, to people generally. You'll find it better not.'

'I have not had the pleasure of seeing my employer yet, sir,' observed Tom, putting his week's salary in his pocket.

'Haven't you?' said Fips. 'No, I don't suppose you have though.'

'I should like to thank him, and to know that what I have done so far, is done to his satisfaction,' faltered Tom.

'Quite right,' said Mr Fips, with a yawn. 'Highly creditable. Very proper.'

Tom hastily resolved to try him on another tack.

'I shall soon have finished with the books,' he said. 'I hope that will not terminate my engagement, sir, or render me useless?'

'Oh dear no!' retorted Fips. 'Plenty to do; plen-ty to do! Be careful how you go. It's rather dark.'

This was the very utmost extent of information Tom could ever get out of HIM. So it was dark enough in all conscience; and if Mr Fips expressed himself with a double meaning, he had good reason for doing so.

But now a circumstance occurred, which helped to divert Tom's thoughts from even this mystery, and to divide them between it and a new channel, which was a very Nile in itself.

The way it came about was this. Having always been an early riser and having now no organ to engage him in sweet converse every morning, it was his habit to take a long walk before going to the Temple; and naturally inclining, as a stranger, towards those parts of the town which were conspicuous for the life and animation pervading them, he became a great frequenter of the market-places, bridges, quays, and especially the steam-boat wharves; for it was very lively and fresh to see the people hurrying away upon their many schemes of business or pleasure, and it made Tom glad to think that there was that much change and freedom in the monotonous routine of city lives.

In most of these morning excursions Ruth accompanied him. As their landlord was always up and away at his business (whatever that might be, no one seemed to know) at a very early hour, the habits of the people of the house in which they lodged corresponded with their own. Thus they had often finished their breakfast, and were out in the summer air, by seven o'clock. After a two hours' stroll they parted at some convenient point; Tom going to the Temple, and his sister returning home, as methodically as you please.

Many and many a pleasant stroll they had in Covent Garden Market; snuffing up the perfume of the fruits and flowers, wondering at the magnificence of the pineapples and melons; catching glimpses down side avenues, of rows and rows of old women, seated on inverted baskets, shelling peas; looking unutterable things at the fat bundles of asparagus with which the dainty shops were fortified as with a breastwork; and, at the herbalist's doors, gratefully inhaling scents as of veal-stuffing yet uncooked, dreamily mixed up with capsicums, brown-paper, seeds, even with hints of lusty snails and fine young curly leeches. Many and many a pleasant stroll they had among the poultry markets, where ducks and fowls, with necks unnaturally long, lay stretched out in pairs, ready for cooking; where there were speckled eggs in mossy baskets, white country sausages beyond impeachment by surviving cat or dog, or horse or donkey; new cheeses to any wild extent, live birds in coops and cages, looking much too big to be natural, in consequence of those receptacles being much too little; rabbits, alive and dead, innumerable. Many a pleasant stroll they had among the cool, refreshing, silvery fish-stalls, with a kind of moonlight effect about their stock-in-trade, excepting always for the ruddy lobsters. Many a pleasant stroll among the waggon-loads of fragrant hay, beneath which dogs and tired waggons lay fast asleep, oblivious of the pieman and the public-house. But never half so good a stroll as down among the steamboats on a bright morning.

There they lay, alongside of each other; hard and fast for ever, to all appearance, but designing to get out somehow, and quite confident of doing it; and in that faith shoals of passengers, and heaps of luggage, were proceeding hurriedly on board. Little steam-boats dashed up and down the stream incessantly. Tiers upon tiers of vessels, scores of masts, labyrinths of tackle, idle sails, splashing oars, gliding row-boats, lumbering barges, sunken piles, with ugly lodgings for the water-rat within their mud-discoloured nooks; church steeples, warehouses, house-roofs, arches, bridges, men and women, children, casks, cranes, boxes horses, coaches, idlers, and hard-labourers; there they were, all jumbled up together, any summer morning, far beyond Tom's power of separation.

In the midst of all this turmoil there was an incessant roar from every packet's funnel, which quite expressed and carried out the uppermost emotion of the scene. They all appeared to be perspiring and bothering themselves, exactly as their passengers did; they never left off fretting and chafing, in their own hoarse manner, once; but were always panting out, without any stops, 'Come along do make haste I'm very nervous come along oh good gracious we shall never get there how late you are do make haste I'm off directly come along!'

Even when they had left off, and had got safely out into the current, on the smallest provocation they began again; for the bravest packet of them all, being stopped by some entanglement in the river, would immediately begin to fume and pant afresh, 'oh here's a stoppage what's the matter do go on there I'm in a hurry it's done on purpose did you ever oh my goodness DO go on here!' and so, in a state of mind bordering on distraction, would be last seen drifting slowly through the mist into the summer light beyond, that made it red.

Tom's ship, however; or, at least, the packet-boat in which Tom and his sister took the greatest interest on one particular occasion; was not off yet, by any means; but was at the height of its disorder. The press of passengers was very great; another steam-boat lay on each side of her; the gangways were choked up; distracted women, obviously bound for Gravesend, but turning a deaf ear to all representations that this particular vessel was about to sail for Antwerp, persisted in secreting baskets of refreshments behind bulk-heads, and water-casks, and under seats; and very great confusion prevailed.

It was so amusing, that Tom, with Ruth upon his arm, stood looking down from the wharf, as nearly regardless as it was in the nature of flesh and blood to be, of an elderly lady behind him, who had brought a large umbrella with her, and didn't know what to do with it. This tremendous instrument had a hooked handle; and its vicinity was first made known to him by a painful pressure on the windpipe,

consequent upon its having caught him round the throat. Soon after disengaging himself with perfect good humour, he had a sensation of the ferule in his back; immediately afterwards, of the hook entangling his ankles; then of the umbrella generally, wandering about his hat, and flapping at it like a great bird; and, lastly, of a poke or thrust below the ribs, which give him such exceeding anguish, that he could not refrain from turning round to offer a mild remonstrance.

Upon his turning round, he found the owner of the umbrella struggling on tip-toe, with a countenance expressive of violent animosity, to look down upon the steam-boats; from which he inferred that she had attacked him, standing in the front row, by design, and as her natural enemy.

'What a very ill-natured person you must be!' said Tom.

The lady cried out fiercely, 'Where's the pelisse!' - meaning the constabulary - and went on to say, shaking the handle of the umbrella at Tom, that but for them fellers never being in the way when they was wanted, she'd have given him in charge, she would.

'If they greased their whiskers less, and minded the duties which they're paid so heavy for, a little more,' she observed, 'no one needn't be drove mad by scrouding so!'

She had been grievously knocked about, no doubt, for her bonnet was bent into the shape of a cocked hat. Being a fat little woman, too, she was in a state of great exhaustion and intense heat. Instead of pursuing the altercation, therefore, Tom civilly inquired what boat she wanted to go on board of?

'I suppose,' returned the lady, 'as nobody but yourself can want to look at a steam package, without wanting to go a-boarding of it, can they! Booby!'

'Which one do you want to look at then?' said Tom. 'We'll make room for you if we can. Don't be so ill-tempered.'

'No blessed creetur as ever I was with in trying times,' returned the lady, somewhat softened, 'and they're a many in their numbers, ever brought it as a charge again myself that I was anythin' but mild and equal in my spirits. Never mind a contradicting of me, if you seem to feel it does you good, ma'am, I often says, for well you know that Sairey may be trusted not to give it back again. But I will not denige that I am worried and wexed this day, and with good reasion, Lord forbid!'

By this time, Mrs Gamp (for it was no other than that experienced practitioner) had, with Tom's assistance, squeezed and worked herself into a small corner between Ruth and the rail; where, after breathing very hard for some little time, and performing a short series of dangerous evolutions with her umbrella, she managed to establish herself pretty comfortably.

'And which of all them smoking monsters is the Ankworke boat, I wonder. Goodness me!' cried Mrs Gamp.

'What boat did you want?' asked Ruth.

'The Ankworke package,' Mrs Gamp replied. 'I will not deceive you, my sweet. Why should I?'

'That is the Antwerp packet in the middle,' said Ruth.

'And I wish it was in Jonadge's belly, I do,' cried Mrs Gamp; appearing to confound the prophet with the whale in this miraculous aspiration.

Ruth said nothing in reply; but, as Mrs Gamp, laying her chin against the cool iron of the rail, continued to look intently at the Antwerp boat, and every now and then to give a little groan, she inquired whether any child of hers was going aboard that morning? Or perhaps her husband, she said kindly.

'Which shows,' said Mrs Gamp, casting up her eyes, 'what a little way you've travelled into this wale of life, my dear young creetur! As a good friend of mine has frequent made remark to me, which her name, my love, is Harris, Mrs Harris through the square and up the steps a-turnin' round by the tobacker shop, 'Oh Sairey, Sairey, little do we know wot lays afore us!' 'Mrs Harris, ma'am,' I says, 'not much, it's true, but more than you suppose. Our calculations, ma'am,' I says, 'respectin' wot the number of a family will be, comes most times within one, and oftener than you would suppose, exact.' 'Sairey,' says Mrs Harris, in a awful way, 'Tell me wot is my indiwidgle number.' 'No, Mrs Harris,' I says to her, 'ex-cuse me, if you please. My own,' I says, 'has fallen out of three-pair backs, and had damp doorsteps settled on their lungs, and one was turned up smilin' in a bedstead unbeknown. Therefore, ma'am,' I says, 'seek not to proticipate, but take 'em as they come and as they go.' Mine,' says Mrs Gamp, 'mine is all gone, my dear young chick. And as to husbands, there's a wooden leg gone likeways home to its account, which in its constancy of walkin' into wine vaults, and never comin' out again 'till fetched by force, was quite as weak as flesh, if not weaker.'

When she had delivered this oration, Mrs Gamp leaned her chin upon the cool iron again; and looking intently at the Antwerp packet, shook her head and groaned.

'I wouldn't,' said Mrs Gamp, 'I wouldn't be a man and have such a think upon my mind! - but nobody as owned the name of man, could do it!'

Tom and his sister glanced at each other; and Ruth, after a moment's hesitation, asked Mrs Gamp what troubled her so much.

'My dear,' returned that lady, dropping her voice, 'you are single, ain't you?'

Ruth laughed blushed, and said 'Yes.'

'Worse luck,' proceeded Mrs Gamp, 'for all parties! But others is married, and in the marriage state; and there is a dear young creetur a-comin' down this mornin' to that very package, which is no more fit to trust herself to sea, than nothin' is!'

She paused here to look over the deck of the packet in question, and on the steps leading down to it, and on the gangways. Seeming to have thus assured herself that the object of her commiseration had not yet arrived, she raised her eyes gradually up to the top of the escape-pipe, and indignantly apostrophised the vessel:

'Oh, drat you!' said Mrs Gamp, shaking her umbrella at it, 'you're a nice spluttering nisy monster for a delicate young creetur to go and be a passinger by; ain't you! YOU never do no harm in that way, do you? With your hammering, and roaring, and hissing, and lamp-iling, you brute! Them Confugion steamers,' said Mrs Gamp, shaking her umbrella again, 'has done more to throw us out of our reg'lar work and bring ewents on at times when nobody counted on 'em (especially them screeching railroad ones), than all the other frights that ever was took. I have heerd of one young man, a guard upon a railway, only three years opened - well does Mrs Harris know him, which indeed he is her own relation by her sister's marriage with a master sawyer - as is godfather at this present time to six-and-twenty blessed little strangers, equally unexpected, and all on 'um named after the Ingeines as was the cause. Ugh!' said Mrs Gamp, resuming her apostrophe, 'one might easy know you was a man's invention, from your disregardlessness of the weakness of our natures, so one might, you brute!'

It would not have been unnatural to suppose, from the first part of Mrs Gamp's lamentations, that she was connected with the stage-coaching or post-horsing trade. She had no means of judging of the

effect of her concluding remarks upon her young companion; for she interrupted herself at this point, and exclaimed:

'There she identically goes! Poor sweet young creetur, there she goes, like a lamb to the sacrificer! If there's any illness when that wessel gets to sea,' said Mrs Gamp, prophetically, 'it's murder, and I'm the witness for the persecution.'

She was so very earnest on the subject, that Tom's sister (being as kind as Tom himself) could not help saying something to her in reply.

'Pray, which is the lady,' she inquired, 'in whom you are so much interested?'

'There!' groaned Mrs Gamp. 'There she goes! A-crossin' the little wooden bridge at this minute. She's a-slippin' on a bit of orangepeel!' tightly clutching her umbrella. 'What a turn it give me.'

'Do you mean the lady who is with that man wrapped up from head to foot in a large cloak, so that his face is almost hidden?'

'Well he may hide it!' Mrs Gamp replied. 'He's good call to be ashamed of himself. Did you see him a-jerking of her wrist, then?'

'He seems to be hasty with her, indeed.'

'Now he's a-taking of her down into the close cabin!' said Mrs Gamp, impatiently. 'What's the man about! The deuce is in him, I think. Why can't he leave her in the open air?'

He did not, whatever his reason was, but led her quickly down and disappeared himself, without loosening his cloak, or pausing on the crowded deck one moment longer than was necessary to clear their way to that part of the vessel.

Tom had not heard this little dialogue; for his attention had been engaged in an unexpected manner. A hand upon his sleeve had caused him to look round, just when Mrs Gamp concluded her apostrophe to the steam-engine; and on his right arm, Ruth being on his left, he found their landlord, to his great surprise.

He was not so much surprised at the man's being there, as at his having got close to him so quietly and swiftly; for another person had been at his elbow one instant before; and he had not in the meantime been conscious of any change or pressure in the knot of people among whom he stood. He and Ruth had frequently remarked how noiselessly this landlord of theirs came into and went out of his own house; but Tom was not the less amazed to see him at his elbow now.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Pinch,' he said in his ear. 'I am rather infirm, and out of breath, and my eyes are not very good. I am not as young as I was, sir. You don't see a gentleman in a large cloak down yonder, with a lady on his arm; a lady in a veil and a black shawl; do you?'

If HE did not, it was curious that in speaking he should have singled out from all the crowd the very people whom he described; and should have glanced hastily from them to Tom, as if he were burning to direct his wandering eyes.

'A gentleman in a large cloak!' said Tom, 'and a lady in a black shawl! Let me see!'

'Yes, yes!' replied the other, with keen impatience. 'A gentleman muffled up from head to foot - strangely muffled up for such a morning as this - like an invalid, with his hand to his face at this minute, perhaps. No, no, no! not there,' he added, following Tom's gaze; 'the other way; in that direction; down yonder.' Again he indicated, but this time in his hurry, with his outstretched finger, the very spot on which the progress of these persons was checked at that moment.

'There are so many people, and so much motion, and so many objects,' said Tom, 'that I find it difficult to - no, I really don't see a gentleman in a large cloak, and a lady in a black shawl. There's a lady in a red shawl over there!'

'No, no, no!' cried his landlord, pointing eagerly again, 'not there. The other way; the other way. Look at the cabin steps. To the left. They must be near the cabin steps. Do you see the cabin steps? There's the bell ringing already! DO you see the steps?'

'Stay!' said Tom, 'you're right. Look! there they go now. Is that the gentleman you mean? Descending at this minute, with the folds of a great cloak trailing down after him?'

'The very man!' returned the other, not looking at what Tom pointed out, however, but at Tom's own face. 'Will you do me a kindness, sir, a great kindness? Will you put that letter in his hand? Only give him that! He expects it. I am charged to do it by my employers, but I am late in finding him, and, not being as young as I have been, should never be able to make my way on board and off the deck again in time. Will you pardon my boldness, and do me that great kindness?'

His hands shook, and his face bespoke the utmost interest and agitation, as he pressed the letter upon Tom, and pointed to its destination, like the Tempter in some grim old carving.

To hesitate in the performance of a good-natured or compassionate office was not in Tom's way. He took the letter; whispered Ruth to wait till he returned, which would be immediately; and ran down the steps with all the expedition he could make. There were so many people going down, so many others coming up, such heavy goods in course of transit to and fro, such a ringing of bell, blowing-off of steam, and shouting of men's voices, that he had much ado to force his way, or keep in mind to which boat he was going. But he reached the right one with good speed, and going down the cabin-stairs immediately, described the object of his search standing at the upper end of the saloon, with his back towards him, reading some notice which was hung against the wall. As Tom advanced to give him the letter, he started, hearing footsteps, and turned round.

What was Tom's astonishment to find in him the man with whom he had had the conflict in the field - poor Mercy's husband. Jonas!

Tom understood him to say, what the devil did he want; but it was not easy to make out what he said; he spoke so indistinctly.

'I want nothing with you for myself,' said Tom; 'I was asked, a moment since, to give you this letter. You were pointed out to me, but I didn't know you in your strange dress. Take it!'

He did so, opened it, and read the writing on the inside. The contents were evidently very brief; not more perhaps than one line; but they struck upon him like a stone from a sling. He reeled back as he read.

His emotion was so different from any Tom had ever seen before that he stopped involuntarily. Momentary as his state of indecision was, the bell ceased while he stood there, and a hoarse voice calling down the steps, inquired if there was any to go ashore?

'Yes,' cried Jonas, 'I - I am coming. Give me time. Where's that woman! Come back; come back here.'

He threw open another door as he spoke, and dragged, rather than led, her forth. She was pale and frightened, and amazed to see her old acquaintance; but had no time to speak, for they were making a great stir above; and Jonas drew her rapidly towards the deck.

'Where are we going? What is the matter?'

'We are going back,' said Jonas. 'I have changed my mind. I can't go. Don't question me, or I shall be the death of you, or some one else. Stop there! Stop! We're for the shore. Do you hear? We're for the shore!'

He turned, even in the madness of his hurry, and scowling darkly back at Tom, shook his clenched hand at him. There are not many human faces capable of the expression with which he accompanied that gesture.

He dragged her up, and Tom followed them. Across the deck, over the side, along the crazy plank, and up the steps, he dragged her fiercely; not bestowing any look on her, but gazing upwards all the while among the faces on the wharf. Suddenly he turned again, and said to Tom with a tremendous oath:

'Where is he?'

Before Tom, in his indignation and amazement, could return an answer to a question he so little understood, a gentleman approached Tom behind, and saluted Jonas Chuzzlewit by name. He has a gentleman of foreign appearance, with a black moustache and whiskers; and addressed him with a polite composure, strangely different from his own distracted and desperate manner.

'Chuzzlewit, my good fellow!' said the gentleman, raising his hat in compliment to Mrs Chuzzlewit, 'I ask your pardon twenty thousand times. I am most unwilling to interfere between you and a domestic trip of this nature (always so very charming and refreshing, I know, although I have not the happiness to be a domestic man myself, which is the great infelicity of my existence); but the beehive, my dear friend, the beehive - will you introduce me?'

'This is Mr Montague,' said Jonas, whom the words appeared to choke.

'The most unhappy and most penitent of men, Mrs Chuzzlewit,' pursued that gentleman, 'for having been the means of spoiling this excursion; but as I tell my friend, the beehive, the beehive. You projected a short little continental trip, my dear friend, of course?'

Jonas maintained a dogged silence.

'May I die,' cried Montague, 'but I am shocked! Upon my soul I am shocked. But that confounded beehive of ours in the city must be paramount to every other consideration, when there is honey to be made; and that is my best excuse. Here is a very singular old female dropping curtseys on my right,' said Montague, breaking off in his discourse, and looking at Mrs Gamp, 'who is not a friend of mine. Does anybody know her?'

'Ah! Well they knows me, bless their precious hearts!' said Mrs Gamp, 'not forgettin' your own merry one, sir, and long may it be so! Wishin'

as every one' (she delivered this in the form of a toast or sentiment) 'was as merry, and as handsome-lookin', as a little bird has whispered me a certain gent is, which I will not name for fear I give offence where none is doo! My precious lady,' here she stopped short in her merriment, for she had until now affected to be vastly entertained, 'you're too pale by half!'

'YOU are here too, are you?' muttered Jonas. 'Ecod, there are enough of you.'

'I hope, sir,' returned Mrs Gamp, dropping an indignant curtsey, 'as no bones is broke by me and Mrs Harris a-walkin' down upon a public wharf. Which was the very words she says to me (although they was the last I ever had to speak) was these: 'Sairey,' she says, 'is it a public wharf?' 'Mrs Harris,' I makes answer, 'can you doubt it? You have know'd me now, ma'am, eight and thirty year; and did you ever know me go, or wish to go, where I was not made welcome, say the words.' 'No, Sairey,' Mrs Harris says, 'contrairy quite.' And well she knows it too. I am but a poor woman, but I've been sought after, sir, though you may not think it. I've been knocked up at all hours of the night, and warned out by a many landlords, in consequence of being mistook for Fire. I goes out workin' for my bread, 'tis true, but I maintains my independency, with your kind leave, and which I will till death. I has my feelins as a woman, sir, and I have been a mother likeways; but touch a pipkin as belongs to me, or make the least remarks on what I eats or drinks, and though you was the favouritest young for'ard hussy of a servant-gal as ever come into a house, either you leaves the place, or me. My earnins is not great, sir, but I will not be impoged upon. Bless the babe, and save the mother, is my mortar, sir; but I makes so free as add to that, Don't try no impogician with the Nuss, for she will not abear it!'

Mrs Gamp concluded by drawing her shawl tightly over herself with both hands, and, as usual, referring to Mrs Harris for full corroboration of these particulars. She had that peculiar trembling of the head which, in ladies of her excitable nature, may be taken as a sure indication of their breaking out again very shortly; when Jonas made a timely interposition.

'As you ARE here,' he said, 'you had better see to her, and take her home. I am otherwise engaged.' He said nothing more; but looked at Montague as if to give him notice that he was ready to attend him.

'I am sorry to take you away,' said Montague.

Jonas gave him a sinister look, which long lived in Tom's memory, and which he often recalled afterwards.

'I am, upon my life,' said Montague. 'Why did you make it necessary?'

With the same dark glance as before, Jonas replied, after a moment's silence:

'The necessity is none of my making. You have brought it about yourself.'

He said nothing more. He said even this as if he were bound, and in the other's power, but had a sullen and suppressed devil within him, which he could not quite resist. His very gait, as they walked away together, was like that of a fettered man; but, striving to work out at his clenched hands, knitted brows, and fast-set lips, was the same imprisoned devil still.

They got into a handsome cabriolet which was waiting for them and drove away.

The whole of this extraordinary scene had passed so rapidly and the tumult which prevailed around as so unconscious of any impression from it, that, although Tom had been one of the chief actors, it was like a dream. No one had noticed him after they had left the packet. He had stood behind Jonas, and so near him, that he could not help hearing all that passed. He had stood there, with his sister on his arm, expecting and hoping to have an opportunity of explaining his strange share in this yet stranger business. But Jonas had not raised his eyes from the ground; no one else had even looked towards him; and before he could resolve on any course of action, they were all gone.

He gazed round for his landlord. But he had done that more than once already, and no such man was to be seen. He was still pursuing this search with his eyes, when he saw a hand beckoning to him from a hackney-coach; and hurrying towards it, found it was Merry's. She addressed him hurriedly, but bent out of the window, that she might not be overheard by her companion, Mrs Gamp.

'What is it?' she said. 'Good heaven, what is it? Why did he tell me last night to prepare for a long journey, and why have you brought us back like criminals? Dear Mr Pinch!' she clasped her hands distractedly, 'be merciful to us. Whatever this dreadful secret is, be merciful, and God will bless you!'

'If any power of mercy lay with me,' cried Tom, 'trust me, you shouldn't ask in vain. But I am far more ignorant and weak than you.'

She withdrew into the coach again, and he saw the hand waving towards him for a moment; but whether in reproachfulness or

incredulity or misery, or grief, or sad adieu, or what else, he could not, being so hurried, understand. SHE was gone now; and Ruth and he were left to walk away, and wonder.

Had Mr Nadgett appointed the man who never came, to meet him upon London Bridge that morning? He was certainly looking over the parapet, and down upon the steamboat-wharf at that moment. It could not have been for pleasure; he never took pleasure. No. He must have had some business there.