

Chapter XLIX

In Which Mrs Harris Assisted By A Teapot, Is The Cause Of A Division Between Friends

Mrs Gamp's apartment in Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, wore, metaphorically speaking, a robe of state. It was swept and garnished for the reception of a visitor. That visitor was Betsey Prig; Mrs Prig, of Bartlemy's; or as some said Barklemy's, or as some said Bardlemy's; for by all these endearing and familiar appellations, had the hospital of Saint Bartholomew become a household word among the sisterhood which Betsey Prig adorned.

Mrs Gamp's apartment was not a spacious one, but, to a contented mind, a closet is a palace; and the first-floor front at Mr Sweedlepipe's may have been, in the imagination of Mrs Gamp, a stately pile. If it were not exactly that, to restless intellects, it at least comprised as much accommodation as any person, not sanguine to insanity, could have looked for in a room of its dimensions. For only keep the bedstead always in your mind; and you were safe. That was the grand secret. Remembering the bedstead, you might even stoop to look under the little round table for anything you had dropped, without hurting yourself much against the chest of drawers, or qualifying as a patient of Saint Bartholomew, by falling into the fire.

Visitors were much assisted in their cautious efforts to preserve an unflagging recollection of this piece of furniture, by its size; which was great. It was not a turn-up bedstead, nor yet a French bedstead, nor yet a four-post bedstead, but what is poetically called a tent; the sacking whereof was low and bulgy, insomuch that Mrs Gamp's box would not go under it, but stopped half-way, in a manner which, while it did violence to the reason, likewise endangered the legs of a stranger. The frame too, which would have supported the canopy and hangings if there had been any, was ornamented with divers pippins carved in timber, which on the slightest provocation, and frequently on none at all, came tumbling down; harassing the peaceful guest with inexplicable terrors.

The bed itself was decorated with a patchwork quilt of great antiquity; and at the upper end, upon the side nearest to the door, hung a scanty curtain of blue check, which prevented the Zephyrs that were abroad in Kingsgate Street, from visiting Mrs Gamp's head too roughly. Some rusty gowns and other articles of that lady's wardrobe depended from the posts; and these had so adapted themselves by long usage to her figure, that more than one impatient husband coming in precipitately, at about the time of twilight, had been for an instant stricken dumb by the supposed discovery that Mrs Gamp had hanged herself. One gentleman, coming on the usual hasty errand,

had said indeed, that they looked like guardian angels 'watching of her in her sleep.' But that, as Mrs Gamp said, 'was his first;' and he never repeated the sentiment, though he often repeated his visit.

The chairs in Mrs Gamp's apartment were extremely large and broad-backed, which was more than a sufficient reason for there being but two in number. They were both elbow-chairs, of ancient mahogany; and were chiefly valuable for the slippery nature of their seats, which had been originally horsehair, but were now covered with a shiny substance of a bluish tint, from which the visitor began to slide away with a dismayed countenance, immediately after sitting down. What Mrs Gamp wanted in chairs she made up in bandboxes; of which she had a great collection, devoted to the reception of various miscellaneous valuables, which were not, however, as well protected as the good woman, by a pleasant fiction, seemed to think; for, though every bandbox had a carefully closed lid, not one among them had a bottom; owing to which cause the property within was merely, as it were, extinguished. The chest of drawers having been originally made to stand upon the top of another chest, had a dwarfish, elfin look, alone; but in regard of its security it had a great advantage over the bandboxes, for as all the handles had been long ago pulled off, it was very difficult to get at its contents. This indeed was only to be done by one or two devices; either by tilting the whole structure forward until all the drawers fell out together, or by opening them singly with knives, like oysters.

Mrs Gamp stored all her household matters in a little cupboard by the fire-place; beginning below the surface (as in nature) with the coals, and mounting gradually upwards to the spirits, which, from motives of delicacy, she kept in a teapot. The chimney-piece was ornamented with a small almanack, marked here and there in Mrs Gamp's own hand with a memorandum of the date at which some lady was expected to fall due. It was also embellished with three profiles: one, in colours, of Mrs Gamp herself in early life; one, in bronze, of a lady in feathers, supposed to be Mrs Harris, as she appeared when dressed for a ball; and one, in black, of Mr Gamp, deceased. The last was a full length, in order that the likeness might be rendered more obvious and forcible by the introduction of the wooden leg.

A pair of bellows, a pair of pattens, a toasting-fork, a kettle, a pap-boat, a spoon for the administration of medicine to the refractory, and lastly, Mrs Gamp's umbrella, which as something of great price and rarity, was displayed with particular ostentation, completed the decorations of the chimney-piece and adjacent wall. Towards these objects Mrs Gamp raised her eyes in satisfaction when she had arranged the tea-board, and had concluded her arrangements for the reception of Betsey Prig, even unto the setting forth of two pounds of Newcastle salmon, intensely pickled.

'There! Now drat you, Betsey, don't be long!' said Mrs Gamp, apostrophizing her absent friend. 'For I can't abear to wait, I do assure you. To wotever place I goes, I sticks to this one mortar, 'I'm easy pleased; it is but little as I wants; but I must have that little of the best, and to the minute when the clock strikes, else we do not part as I could wish, but bearin' malice in our arts.'

Her own preparations were of the best, for they comprehended a delicate new loaf, a plate of fresh butter, a basin of fine white sugar, and other arrangements on the same scale. Even the snuff with which she now refreshed herself, was so choice in quality that she took a second pinch.

'There's the little bell a-ringing now,' said Mrs Gamp, hurrying to the stair-head and looking over. 'Betsey Prig, my - why it's that there disapintin' Sweedlepipes, I do believe.'

'Yes, it's me,' said the barber in a faint voice; 'I've just come in.'

'You're always a-comin' in, I think,' muttered Mrs Gamp to herself, 'except wen you're a-goin' out. I ha'n't no patience with that man!'

'Mrs Gamp,' said the barber. 'I say! Mrs Gamp!'

'Well,' cried Mrs Gamp, impatiently, as she descended the stairs. 'What is it? Is the Thames a-fire, and cooking its own fish, Mr Sweedlepipes? Why wot's the man gone and been a-doin' of to himself? He's as white as chalk!'

She added the latter clause of inquiry, when she got downstairs, and found him seated in the shaving-chair, pale and disconsolate.

'You recollect,' said Poll. 'You recollect young - '

'Not young Wilkins!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'Don't say young Wilkins, wotever you do. If young Wilkins's wife is took - '

'It isn't anybody's wife,' exclaimed the little barber. 'Bailey, young Bailey!'

'Why, wot do you mean to say that chit's been a-doin' of?' retorted Mrs Gamp, sharply. 'Stuff and nonsense, Mrs Sweedlepipes!'

'He hasn't been a-doing anything!' exclaimed poor Poll, quite desperate. 'What do you catch me up so short for, when you see me put out to that extent that I can hardly speak? He'll never do anything again. He's done for. He's killed. The first time I ever see that boy,' said Poll, 'I charged him too much for a red-poll. I asked him three-

halfpence for a penny one, because I was afraid he'd beat me down. But he didn't. And now he's dead; and if you was to crowd all the steam-engines and electric fluids that ever was, into this shop, and set 'em every one to work their hardest, they couldn't square the account, though it's only a ha'penny!

Mr Sweedlepipe turned aside to the towel, and wiped his eyes with it.

'And what a clever boy he was!' he said. 'What a surprising young chap he was! How he talked! and what a deal he know'd! Shaved in this very chair he was; only for fun; it was all his fun; he was full of it. Ah! to think that he'll never be shaved in earnest! The birds might every one have died, and welcome,' cried the little barber, looking round him at the cages, and again applying to the towel, 'sooner than I'd have heard this news!'

'How did you ever come to hear it?' said Mrs Gamp, 'who told you?'

'I went out,' returned the little barber, 'into the City, to meet a sporting gent upon the Stock Exchange, that wanted a few slow pigeons to practice at; and when I'd done with him, I went to get a little drop of beer, and there I heard everybody a-talking about it. It's in the papers.'

'You are in a nice state of confugion, Mr Sweedlepipes, you are!' said Mrs Gamp, shaking her head; 'and my opinion is, as half-a-dudgeon fresh young lively leeches on your temples, wouldn't be too much to clear your mind, which so I tell you. Wot were they a-talkin' on, and wot was in the papers?'

'All about it!' cried the barber. 'What else do you suppose? Him and his master were upset on a journey, and he was carried to Salisbury, and was breathing his last when the account came away. He never spoke afterwards. Not a single word. That's the worst of it to me; but that ain't all. His master can't be found. The other manager of their office in the city, Crimple, David Crimple, has gone off with the money, and is advertised for, with a reward, upon the walls. Mr Montague, poor young Bailey's master (what a boy he was!) is advertised for, too. Some say he's slipped off, to join his friend abroad; some say he mayn't have got away yet; and they're looking for him high and low. Their office is a smash; a swindle altogether. But what's a Life Assurance office to a Life! And what a Life Young Bailey's was!'

'He was born into a wale,' said Mrs Gamp, with philosophical coolness. 'and he lived in a wale; and he must take the consequences of sech a sitiuation. But don't you hear nothink of Mr Chuzzlewit in all this?'

'No,' said Poll, 'nothing to speak of. His name wasn't printed as one of the board, though some people say it was just going to be. Some believe he was took in, and some believe he was one of the takers-in; but however that may be, they can't prove nothing against him. This morning he went up of his own accord afore the Lord Mayor or some of them City big-wigs, and complained that he'd been swindled, and that these two persons had gone off and cheated him, and that he had just found out that Montague's name wasn't even Montague, but something else. And they do say that he looked like Death, owing to his losses. But, Lord forgive me,' cried the barber, coming back again to the subject of his individual grief, 'what's his looks to me! He might have died and welcome, fifty times, and not been such a loss as Bailey!'

At this juncture the little bell rang, and the deep voice of Mrs Prig struck into the conversation.

'Oh! You're a-talkin' about it, are you!' observed that lady. 'Well, I hope you've got it over, for I ain't interested in it myself.'

'My precious Betsey,' said Mrs Gamp, 'how late you are!'

The worthy Mrs Prig replied, with some asperity, 'that if perverse people went off dead, when they was least expected, it warn't no fault of her'n.' And further, 'that it was quite aggrawation enough to be made late when one was dropping for one's tea, without hearing on it again.'

Mrs Gamp, deriving from this exhibition of repartee some clue to the state of Mrs Prig's feelings, instantly conducted her upstairs; deeming that the sight of pickled salmon might work a softening change.

But Betsey Prig expected pickled salmon. It was obvious that she did; for her first words, after glancing at the table, were:

'I know'd she wouldn't have a cowcumber!'

Mrs Gamp changed colour, and sat down upon the bedstead.

'Lord bless you, Betsey Prig, your words is true. I quite forgot it!'

Mrs Prig, looking steadfastly at her friend, put her hand in her pocket, and with an air of surly triumph drew forth either the oldest of lettuces or youngest of cabbages, but at any rate, a green vegetable of an expansive nature, and of such magnificent proportions that she was obliged to shut it up like an umbrella before she could pull it out. She also produced a handful of mustard and cress, a trifle of the herb called dandelion, three bunches of radishes, an onion rather larger

than an average turnip, three substantial slices of beetroot, and a short prong or antler of celery; the whole of this garden-stuff having been publicly exhibited, but a short time before, as a twopenny salad, and purchased by Mrs Prig on condition that the vendor could get it all into her pocket. Which had been happily accomplished, in High Holborn, to the breathless interest of a hackney-coach stand. And she laid so little stress on this surprising forethought, that she did not even smile, but returning her pocket into its accustomed sphere, merely recommended that these productions of nature should be sliced up, for immediate consumption, in plenty of vinegar.

'And don't go a-droppin' none of your snuff in it,' said Mrs Prig. 'In gruel, barley-water, apple-tea, mutton-broth, and that, it don't signify. It stimulates a patient. But I don't relish it myself.'

'Why, Betsey Prig!' cried Mrs Gamp, 'how CAN you talk so!'

'Why, ain't your patients, wotever their diseases is, always asneezin' their very heads off, along of your snuff?' said Mrs Prig.

'And wot if they are!' said Mrs Gamp

'Nothing if they are,' said Mrs Prig. 'But don't deny it, Sairah.'

'Who deniges of it?' Mrs Gamp inquired.

Mrs Prig returned no answer.

'WHO deniges of it, Betsey?' Mrs Gamp inquired again. Then Mrs Gamp, by reversing the question, imparted a deeper and more awful character of solemnity to the same. 'Betsey, who deniges of it?'

It was the nearest possible approach to a very decided difference of opinion between these ladies; but Mrs Prig's impatience for the meal being greater at the moment than her impatience of contradiction, she replied, for the present, 'Nobody, if you don't, Sairah,' and prepared herself for tea. For a quarrel can be taken up at any time, but a limited quantity of salmon cannot.

Her toilet was simple. She had merely to 'chuck' her bonnet and shawl upon the bed; give her hair two pulls, one upon the right side and one upon the left, as if she were ringing a couple of bells; and all was done. The tea was already made, Mrs Gamp was not long over the salad, and they were soon at the height of their repast.

The temper of both parties was improved, for the time being, by the enjoyments of the table. When the meal came to a termination (which it was pretty long in doing), and Mrs Gamp having cleared away,

produced the teapot from the top shelf, simultaneously with a couple of wine-glasses, they were quite amiable.

'Betsey,' said Mrs Gamp, filling her own glass and passing the teapot, 'I will now propoge a toast. My frequent pardner, Betsey Prig!'

'Which, altering the name to Sairah Gamp; I drink,' said Mrs Prig, 'with love and tenderness.'

From this moment symptoms of inflammation began to lurk in the nose of each lady; and perhaps, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, in the temper also.

'Now, Sairah,' said Mrs Prig, 'joining business with pleasure, wot is this case in which you wants me?'

Mrs Gamp betraying in her face some intention of returning an evasive answer, Betsey added:

'IS it Mrs Harris?'

'No, Betsey Prig, it ain't,' was Mrs Gamp's reply.

'Well!' said Mrs Prig, with a short laugh. 'I'm glad of that, at any rate.'

'Why should you be glad of that, Betsey?' Mrs Gamp retorted, warmly. 'She is unbeknown to you except by hearsay, why should you be glad? If you have anythink to say contrairy to the character of Mrs Harris, which well I knows behind her back, afore her face, or anywheres, is not to be impeaged, out with it, Betsey. I have know'd that sweetest and best of women,' said Mrs Gamp, shaking her head, and shedding tears, 'ever since afore her First, which Mr Harris who was dreadful timid went and stopped his ears in a empty dog-kennel, and never took his hands away or come out once till he was showed the baby, wen bein' took with fits, the doctor collared him and laid him on his back upon the airy stones, and she was told to ease her mind, his owls was organs. And I have know'd her, Betsey Prig, when he has hurt her feelin' art by sayin' of his Ninth that it was one too many, if not two, while that dear innocent was cooin' in his face, which thrive it did though bandy, but I have never know'd as you had occagion to be glad, Betsey, on accounts of Mrs Harris not requiring you. Require she never will, depend upon it, for her constant words in sickness is, and will be, 'Send for Sairey?'

During this touching address, Mrs Prig adroitly feigning to be the victim of that absence of mind which has its origin in excessive attention to one topic, helped herself from the teapot without

appearing to observe it. Mrs Gamp observed it, however, and came to a premature close in consequence.

'Well, it ain't her, it seems,' said Mrs Prig, coldly; 'who is it then?'

'You have heerd me mention, Betsey,' Mrs Gamp replied, after glancing in an expressive and marked manner at the tea-pot, 'a person as I took care on at the time as you and me was pardners off and on, in that there fever at the Bull?'

'Old Snuffey,' Mrs Prig observed.

Sarah Gamp looked at her with an eye of fire, for she saw in this mistake of Mrs Prig, another willful and malignant stab at that same weakness or custom of hers, an ungenerous allusion to which, on the part of Betsey, had first disturbed their harmony that evening. And she saw it still more clearly, when, politely but firmly correcting that lady by the distinct enunciation of the word 'Chuffey,' Mrs Prig received the correction with a diabolical laugh.

The best among us have their failings, and it must be conceded of Mrs Prig, that if there were a blemish in the goodness of her disposition, it was a habit she had of not bestowing all its sharp and acid properties upon her patients (as a thoroughly amiable woman would have done), but of keeping a considerable remainder for the service of her friends. Highly pickled salmon, and lettuces chopped up in vinegar, may, as viands possessing some acidity of their own, have encouraged and increased this failing in Mrs Prig; and every application to the teapot certainly did; for it was often remarked of her by her friends, that she was most contradictory when most elevated. It is certain that her countenance became about this time derisive and defiant, and that she sat with her arms folded, and one eye shut up, in a somewhat offensive, because obtrusively intelligent, manner.

Mrs Gamp observing this, felt it the more necessary that Mrs Prig should know her place, and be made sensible of her exact station in society, as well as of her obligations to herself. She therefore assumed an air of greater patronage and importance, as she went on to answer Mrs Prig a little more in detail.

'Mr Chuffey, Betsey,' said Mrs Gamp, 'is weak in his mind. Excuse me if I makes remark, that he may neither be so weak as people thinks, nor people may not think he is so weak as they pretends, and what I knows, I knows; and what you don't, you don't; so do not ask me, Betsey. But Mr Chuffey's friends has made propojals for his bein' took care on, and has said to me, 'Mrs Gamp, WILL you undertake it? We couldn't think,' they says, 'of trusting him to nobody but you, for, Sairey, you are gold as has passed the furnage. Will you undertake it,

at your own price, day and night, and by your own self?' 'No,' I says, 'I will not. Do not reckon on it. There is,' I says, 'but one creetur in the world as I would undertake on sech terms, and her name is Harris. But,' I says, 'I am acquainted with a friend, whose name is Betsey Prig, that I can recommend, and will assist me. Betsey,' I says, 'is always to be trusted under me, and will be guided as I could desire.'

Here Mrs Prig, without any abatement of her offensive manner again counterfeited abstraction of mind, and stretched out her hand to the teapot. It was more than Mrs Gamp could bear. She stopped the hand of Mrs Prig with her own, and said, with great feeling:

'No, Betsey! Drink fair, wotever you do!'

Mrs Prig, thus baffled, threw herself back in her chair, and closing the same eye more emphatically, and folding her arms tighter, suffered her head to roll slowly from side to side, while she surveyed her friend with a contemptuous smile.

Mrs Gamp resumed:

'Mrs Harris, Betsey - '

'Bother Mrs Harris!' said Betsey Prig.

Mrs Gamp looked at her with amazement, incredulity, and indignation; when Mrs Prig, shutting her eye still closer, and folding her arms still tighter, uttered these memorable and tremendous words:

'I don't believe there's no sich a person!'

After the utterance of which expressions, she leaned forward, and snapped her fingers once, twice, thrice; each time nearer to the face of Mrs Gamp, and then rose to put on her bonnet, as one who felt that there was now a gulf between them, which nothing could ever bridge across.

The shock of this blow was so violent and sudden, that Mrs Gamp sat staring at nothing with uplifted eyes, and her mouth open as if she were gasping for breath, until Betsey Prig had put on her bonnet and her shawl, and was gathering the latter about her throat. Then Mrs Gamp rose - morally and physically rose - and denounced her.

'What!' said Mrs Gamp, 'you bage creetur, have I know'd Mrs Harris five and thirty year, to be told at last that there ain't no sech a person livin'! Have I stood her friend in all her troubles, great and small, for it to come at last to sech a end as this, which her own sweet picter

hanging up afore you all the time, to shame your Bragian words! But well you mayn't believe there's no sech a creetur, for she wouldn't demean herself to look at you, and often has she said, when I have made mention of your name, which, to my sinful sorrow, I have done, 'What, Sairey Gamp! debase yourself to HER!' Go along with you!

'I'm a-goin', ma'am, ain't I?' said Mrs Prig, stopping as she said it.

'You had better, ma'am,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Do you know who you're talking to, ma'am?' inquired her visitor.

'Aperiently,' said Mrs Gamp, surveying her with scorn from head to foot, 'to Betsey Prig. Aperiently so. I know her. No one better. Go along with you!'

'And YOU was a-goin' to take me under you!' cried Mrs Prig, surveying Mrs Gamp from head to foot in her turn. 'YOU was, was you? Oh, how kind! Why, deuce take your imperence,' said Mrs Prig, with a rapid change from banter to ferocity, 'what do you mean?'

'Go along with you!' said Mrs Gamp. 'I blush for you.'

'You had better blush a little for yourself, while you ARE about it!' said Mrs Prig. 'You and your Chuffeys! What, the poor old creetur isn't mad enough, isn't he? Aha!'

'He'd very soon be mad enough, if you had anything to do with him,' said Mrs Gamp.

'And that's what I was wanted for, is it?' cried Mrs Prig, triumphantly. 'Yes. But you'll find yourself deceived. I won't go near him. We shall see how you get on without me. I won't have nothink to do with him.'

'You never spoke a truer word than that!' said Mrs Gamp. 'Go along with you!'

She was prevented from witnessing the actual retirement of Mrs Prig from the room, notwithstanding the great desire she had expressed to behold it, by that lady, in her angry withdrawal, coming into contact with the bedstead, and bringing down the previously mentioned pippins; three or four of which came rattling on the head of Mrs Gamp so smartly, that when she recovered from this wooden shower-bath, Mrs Prig was gone.

She had the satisfaction, however, of hearing the deep voice of Betsey, proclaiming her injuries and her determination to have nothing to do with Mr Chuffey, down the stairs, and along the passage, and even

out in Kingsgate Street. Likewise of seeing in her own apartment, in the place of Mrs Prig, Mr Sweedlepipe and two gentlemen.

'Why, bless my life!' exclaimed the little barber, 'what's amiss? The noise you ladies have been making, Mrs Gamp! Why, these two gentlemen have been standing on the stairs, outside the door, nearly all the time, trying to make you hear, while you were pelting away, hammer and tongs! It'll be the death of the little bullfinch in the shop, that draws his own water. In his fright, he's been a-straining himself all to bits, drawing more water than he could drink in a twelvemonth. He must have thought it was Fire!'

Mrs Gamp had in the meanwhile sunk into her chair, from whence, turning up her overflowing eyes, and clasping her hands, she delivered the following lamentation:

'Oh, Mr Sweedlepipes, which Mr Westlock also, if my eyes do not deceive, and a friend not havin' the pleasure of bein' bekknown, wot I have took from Betsey Prig this blessed night, no mortal creetur knows! If she had abuged me, bein' in liquor, which I thought I smelt her wen she come, but could not so believe, not bein' used myself - Mrs Gamp, by the way, was pretty far gone, and the fragrance of the teapot was strong in the room - 'I could have bore it with a thankful art. But the words she spoke of Mrs Harris, lambs could not forgive. No, Betsey!' said Mrs Gamp, in a violent burst of feeling, 'nor worms forget!'

The little barber scratched his head, and shook it, and looked at the teapot, and gradually got out of the room. John Westlock, taking a chair, sat down on one side of Mrs Gamp. Martin, taking the foot of the bed, supported her on the other.

'You wonder what we want, I daresay,' observed John. 'I'll tell you presently, when you have recovered. It's not pressing, for a few minutes or so. How do you find yourself? Better?'

Mrs Gamp shed more tears, shook her head and feebly pronounced Mrs Harris's name.

'Have a little - ' John was at a loss what to call it.

'Tea,' suggested Martin.

'It ain't tea,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Physic of some sort, I suppose,' cried John. 'Have a little.'

Mrs Gamp was prevailed upon to take a glassful. 'On condition,' she passionately observed, 'as Betsey never has another stroke of work from me.'

'Certainly not,' said John. 'She shall never help to nurse ME.'

'To think,' said Mrs Gamp, 'as she should ever have helped to nuss that friend of yourn, and been so near of hearing things that - Ah!'

John looked at Martin.

'Yes,' he said. 'That was a narrow escape, Mrs Gamp.'

'Narrer, in-deed!' she returned. 'It was only my having the night, and hearin' of him in his wanderins; and her the day, that saved it. Wot would she have said and done, if she had know'd what I know; that perfeejus wretch! Yet, oh good gracious me!' cried Mrs Gamp, trampling on the floor, in the absence of Mrs Prig, 'that I should hear from that same woman's lips what I have heerd her speak of Mrs Harris!'

'Never mind,' said John. 'You know it is not true.'

'Isn't true!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'True! Don't I know as that dear woman is expecting of me at this minnit, Mr Westlock, and is a-lookin' out of window down the street, with little Tommy Harris in her arms, as calls me his own Gammy, and truly calls, for bless the mottled little legs of that there precious child (like Canterbury Brawn his own dear father says, which so they are) his own I have been, ever since I found him, Mr Westlock, with his small red worsted shoe a-gurglin' in his throat, where he had put it in his play, a chick, wile they was leavin' of him on the floor a-lookin' for it through the ouse and him a-choakin' sweetly in the parlour! Oh, Betsey Prig, what wickedness you've showed this night, but never shall you darken Sairey's doors agen, you twining serpiant!'

'You were always so kind to her, too!' said John, consolingly.

'That's the cutting part. That's where it hurts me, Mr Westlock,' Mrs Gamp replied; holding out her glass unconsciously, while Martin filled it.

'Chosen to help you with Mr Lewsome!' said John. 'Chosen to help you with Mr Chuffey!'

'Chose once, but chose no more,' cried Mrs Gamp. 'No pardnership with Betsey Prig agen, sir!'

'No, no,' said John. 'That would never do.'

'I don't know as it ever would have done, sir,' Mrs Gamp replied, with a solemnity peculiar to a certain stage of intoxication. 'Now that the marks,' by which Mrs Gamp is supposed to have meant mask, 'is off that creetur's face, I do not think it ever would have done. There are regions in families for keeping things a secret, Mr Westlock, and havin' only them about you as you knows you can repace in. Who could repace in Betsey Prig, arter her words of Mrs Harris, setting in that chair afore my eyes!'

'Quite true,' said John; 'quite. I hope you have time to find another assistant, Mrs Gamp?'

Between her indignation and the teapot, her powers of comprehending what was said to her began to fail. She looked at John with tearful eyes, and murmuring the well-remembered name which Mrs Prig had challenged - as if it were a talisman against all earthly sorrows - seemed to wander in her mind.

'I hope,' repeated John, 'that you have time to find another assistant?'

'Which short it is, indeed,' cried Mrs Gamp, turning up her languid eyes, and clasping Mr Westlock's wrist with matronly affection. 'Tomorrow evenin', sir, I waits upon his friends. Mr Chuzzlewit apinted it from nine to ten.'

'From nine to ten,' said John, with a significant glance at Martin. 'and then Mr Chuffey retires into safe keeping, does he?'

'He needs to be kep safe, I do assure you,' Mrs Gamp replied with a mysterious air. 'Other people besides me has had a happy deliverance from Betsey Prig. I little know'd that woman. She'd have let it out!'

'Let HIM out, you mean,' said John.

'Do I!' retorted Mrs Gamp. 'Oh!'

The severely ironical character of this reply was strengthened by a very slow nod, and a still slower drawing down of the corners of Mrs Gamp's mouth. She added with extreme stateliness of manner after indulging in a short doze:

'But I am a-keepin' of you gentlemen, and time is precious.'

Mingling with that delusion of the teapot which inspired her with the belief that they wanted her to go somewhere immediately, a shrewd avoidance of any further reference to the topics into which she had

lately strayed, Mrs Gamp rose; and putting away the teapot in its accustomed place, and locking the cupboard with much gravity proceeded to attire herself for a professional visit.

This preparation was easily made, as it required nothing more than the snuffy black bonnet, the snuffy black shawl, the pattens and the indispensable umbrella, without which neither a lying-in nor a laying-out could by any possibility be attempted. When Mrs Gamp had invested herself with these appendages she returned to her chair, and sitting down again, declared herself quite ready.

'It's a 'appiness to know as one can benefit the poor sweet creetur,' she observed, 'I'm sure. It isn't all as can. The torters Betsey Prig inflicts is frightful!'

Closing her eyes as she made this remark, in the acuteness of her commiseration for Betsey's patients, she forgot to open them again until she dropped a patten. Her nap was also broken at intervals like the fabled slumbers of Friar Bacon, by the dropping of the other patten, and of the umbrella. But when she had got rid of those incumbrances, her sleep was peaceful.

The two young men looked at each other, ludicrously enough; and Martin, stifling his disposition to laugh, whispered in John Westlock's ear,

'What shall we do now?'

'Stay here,' he replied.

Mrs Gamp was heard to murmur 'Mrs Harris' in her sleep.

'Rely upon it,' whispered John, looking cautiously towards her, 'that you shall question this old clerk, though you go as Mrs Harris herself. We know quite enough to carry her our own way now, at all events; thanks to this quarrel, which confirms the old saying that when rogues fall out, honest people get what they want. Let Jonas Chuzzlewit look to himself; and let her sleep as long as she likes. We shall gain our end in good time.'