

## Chapter LIII

### **What John Westlock Said To Tom Pinch's Sister; What Tom Pinch's Sister Said To John Westlock; What Tom Pinch Said To Both Of Them; And How They All Passed The Remainder Of The Day**

Brilliantly the Temple Fountain sparkled in the sun, and laughingly its liquid music played, and merrily the idle drops of water danced and danced, and peeping out in sport among the trees, plunged lightly down to hide themselves, as little Ruth and her companion came toward it.

And why they came toward the Fountain at all is a mystery; for they had no business there. It was not in their way. It was quite out of their way. They had no more to do with the Fountain, bless you, than they had with - with Love, or any out-of-the-way thing of that sort.

It was all very well for Tom and his sister to make appointments by the Fountain, but that was quite another affair. Because, of course, when she had to wait a minute or two, it would have been very awkward for her to have had to wait in any but a tolerably quiet spot; but that was as quiet a spot, everything considered, as they could choose. But when she had John Westlock to take care of her, and was going home with her arm in his (home being in a different direction altogether), their coming anywhere near that Fountain was quite extraordinary.

However, there they found themselves. And another extraordinary part of the matter was, that they seemed to have come there, by a silent understanding. Yet when they got there, they were a little confused by being there, which was the strangest part of all; because there is nothing naturally confusing in a Fountain. We all know that.

'What a good old place it was!' John said. With quite an earnest affection for it.

'A pleasant place indeed,' said little Ruth. 'So shady!'

Oh wicked little Ruth!

They came to a stop when John began to praise it. The day was exquisite; and stopping at all, it was quite natural - nothing could be more so - that they should glance down Garden Court; because Garden Court ends in the Garden, and the Garden ends in the River, and that glimpse is very bright and fresh and shining on a summer's day. Then, oh, little Ruth, why not look boldly at it! Why fit that tiny, precious, blessed little foot into the cracked corner of an insensible old

flagstone in the pavement; and be so very anxious to adjust it to a nicety!

If the Fiery-faced matron in the crunched bonnet could have seen them as they walked away, how many years' purchase might Fiery Face have been disposed to take for her situation in Furnival's Inn as laundress to Mr Westlock!

They went away, but not through London's streets! Through some enchanted city, where the pavements were of air; where all the rough sounds of a stirring town were softened into gentle music; where everything was happy; where there was no distance, and no time. There were two good-tempered burly draymen letting down big butts of beer into a cellar, somewhere; and when John helped her - almost lifted her - the lightest, easiest, neatest thing you ever saw - across the rope, they said he owed them a good turn for giving him the chance. Celestial draymen!

Green pastures in the summer tide, deep-littered straw yards in the winter, no start of corn and clover, ever, to that noble horse who WOULD dance on the pavement with a gig behind him, and who frightened her, and made her clasp his arm with both hands (both hands meeting one upon the another so endearingly!), and caused her to implore him to take refuge in the pastry-cook's, and afterwards to peep out at the door so shrinkingly; and then, looking at him with those eyes, to ask him was he sure - now was he sure - they might go safely on! Oh for a string of rampant horses! For a lion, for a bear, for a mad bull, for anything to bring the little hands together on his arm again!

They talked, of course. They talked of Tom, and all these changes and the attachment Mr Chuzzlewit had conceived for him, and the bright prospects he had in such a friend, and a great deal more to the same purpose. The more they talked, the more afraid this fluttering little Ruth became of any pause; and sooner than have a pause she would say the same things over again; and if she hadn't courage or presence of mind enough for that (to say the truth she very seldom had), she was ten thousand times more charming and irresistible than she had been before.

'Martin will be married very soon now, I suppose?' said John.

She supposed he would. Never did a bewitching little woman suppose anything in such a faint voice as Ruth supposed that.

But seeing that another of those alarming pauses was approaching, she remarked that he would have a beautiful wife. Didn't Mr Westlock think so?

'Ye - yes,' said John, 'oh, yes.'

She feared he was rather hard to please, he spoke so coldly.

'Rather say already pleased,' said John. 'I have scarcely seen her. I had no care to see her. I had no eyes for HER, this morning.'

Oh, good gracious!

It was well they had reached their destination. She never could have gone any further. It would have been impossible to walk in such a tremble.

Tom had not come in. They entered the triangular parlour together, and alone. Fiery Face, Fiery Face, how many years' purchase NOW!

She sat down on the little sofa, and untied her bonnet-strings. He sat down by her side, and very near her; very, very near her. Oh rapid, swelling, bursting little heart, you knew that it would come to this, and hoped it would. Why beat so wildly, heart!

'Dear Ruth! Sweet Ruth! If I had loved you less, I could have told you that I loved you, long ago. I have loved you from the first. There never was a creature in the world more truly loved than you, dear Ruth, by me!'

She clasped her little hands before her face. The gushing tears of joy, and pride, and hope, and innocent affection, would not be restrained. Fresh from her full young heart they came to answer him.

'My dear love! If this is - I almost dare to hope it is, now - not painful or distressing to you, you make me happier than I can tell, or you imagine. Darling Ruth! My own good, gentle, winning Ruth! I hope I know the value of your heart, I hope I know the worth of your angel nature. Let me try and show you that I do; and you will make me happier, Ruth - '

'Not happier,' she sobbed, 'than you make me. No one can be happier, John, than you make me!'

Fiery Face, provide yourself! The usual wages or the usual warning. It's all over, Fiery Face. We needn't trouble you any further.

The little hands could meet each other now, without a rampant horse to urge them. There was no occasion for lions, bears, or mad bulls. It could all be done, and infinitely better, without their assistance. No burly drayman or big butts of beer, were wanted for apologies. No apology at all was wanted. The soft light touch fell coyly, but quite

naturally, upon the lover's shoulder; the delicate waist, the drooping head, the blushing cheek, the beautiful eyes, the exquisite mouth itself, were all as natural as possible. If all the horses in Araby had run away at once, they couldn't have improved upon it.

They soon began to talk of Tom again.

'I hope he will be glad to hear of it!' said John, with sparkling eyes.

Ruth drew the little hands a little tighter when he said it, and looked up seriously into his face.

'I am never to leave him, AM I, dear? I could never leave Tom. I am sure you know that.'

'Do you think I would ask you?' he returned, with a - well! Never mind with what.

'I am sure you never would,' she answered, the bright tears standing in her eyes.

'And I will swear it, Ruth, my darling, if you please. Leave Tom! That would be a strange beginning. Leave Tom, dear! If Tom and we be not inseparable, and Tom (God bless him) have not all honour and all love in our home, my little wife, may that home never be! And that's a strong oath, Ruth.'

Shall it be recorded how she thanked him? Yes, it shall. In all simplicity and innocence and purity of heart, yet with a timid, graceful, half-determined hesitation, she set a little rosy seal upon the vow, whose colour was reflected in her face, and flashed up to the braiding of her dark brown hair.

'Tom will be so happy, and so proud, and glad,' she said, clasping her little hands. 'But so surprised! I am sure he had never thought of such a thing.'

Of course John asked her immediately - because you know they were in that foolish state when great allowances must be made - when SHE had begun to think of such a thing, and this made a little diversion in their talk; a charming diversion to them, but not so interesting to us; at the end of which, they came back to Tom again.

'Ah! dear Tom!' said Ruth. 'I suppose I ought to tell you everything now. I should have no secrets from you. Should I, John, love?'

It is of no use saying how that preposterous John answered her, because he answered in a manner which is untranslatable on paper

though highly satisfactory in itself. But what he conveyed was, No no no, sweet Ruth; or something to that effect.

Then she told him Tom's great secret; not exactly saying how she had found it out, but leaving him to understand it if he liked; and John was sadly grieved to hear it, and was full of sympathy and sorrow. But they would try, he said, only the more, on this account to make him happy, and to beguile him with his favourite pursuits. And then, in all the confidence of such a time, he told her how he had a capital opportunity of establishing himself in his old profession in the country; and how he had been thinking, in the event of that happiness coming upon him which had actually come - there was another slight diversion here - how he had been thinking that it would afford occupation to Tom, and enable them to live together in the easiest manner, without any sense of dependence on Tom's part; and to be as happy as the day was long. And Ruth receiving this with joy, they went on catering for Tom to that extent that they had already purchased him a select library and built him an organ, on which he was performing with the greatest satisfaction, when they heard him knocking at the door.

Though she longed to tell him what had happened, poor little Ruth was greatly agitated by his arrival; the more so because she knew that Mr Chuzzlewit was with him. So she said, all in a tremble:

'What shall I do, dear John! I can't bear that he should hear it from any one but me, and I could not tell him, unless we were alone.'

'Do, my love,' said John, 'whatever is natural to you on the impulse of the moment, and I am sure it will be right.'

He had hardly time to say thus much, and Ruth had hardly time to - just to get a little farther off - upon the sofa, when Tom and Mr Chuzzlewit came in. Mr Chuzzlewit came first, and Tom was a few seconds behind him.

Now Ruth had hastily resolved that she would beckon Tom upstairs after a short time, and would tell him in his little bedroom. But when she saw his dear old face come in, her heart was so touched that she ran into his arms, and laid her head down on his breast and sobbed out, 'Bless me, Tom! My dearest brother!'

Tom looked up, in surprise, and saw John Westlock close beside him, holding out his hand.

'John!' cried Tom. 'John!'

'Dear Tom,' said his friend, 'give me your hand. We are brothers, Tom.'

Tom wrung it with all his force, embraced his sister fervently, and put her in John Westlock's arms.

'Don't speak to me, John. Heaven is very good to us. I - ' Tom could find no further utterance, but left the room; and Ruth went after him.

And when they came back, which they did by-and-bye, she looked more beautiful, and Tom more good and true (if that were possible) than ever. And though Tom could not speak upon the subject even now; being yet too newly glad, he put both his hands in both of John's with emphasis sufficient for the best speech ever spoken.

'I am glad you chose to-day,' said Mr Chuzzlewit to John; with the same knowing smile as when they had left him. 'I thought you would. I hoped Tom and I lingered behind a discreet time. It's so long since I had any practical knowledge of these subjects, that I have been anxious, I assure you.'

'Your knowledge is still pretty accurate, sir,' returned John, laughing, 'if it led you to foresee what would happen to-day.'

'Why, I am not sure, Mr Westlock,' said the old man, 'that any great spirit of prophecy was needed, after seeing you and Ruth together. Come hither, pretty one. See what Tom and I purchased this morning, while you were dealing in exchange with that young merchant there.'

The old man's way of seating her beside him, and humouring his voice as if she were a child, was whimsical enough, but full of tenderness, and not ill adapted, somehow, to little Ruth.

'See here!' he said, taking a case from his pocket, 'what a beautiful necklace. Ah! How it glitters! Earrings, too, and bracelets, and a zone for your waist. This set is yours, and Mary has another like it. Tom couldn't understand why I wanted two. What a short-sighted Tom! Earrings and bracelets, and a zone for your waist! Ah! Beautiful! Let us see how brave they look. Ask Mr Westlock to clasp them on.'

It was the prettiest thing to see her holding out her round, white arm; and John (oh deep, deep John!) pretending that the bracelet was very hard to fasten; it was the prettiest thing to see her girding on the precious little zone, and yet obliged to have assistance because her fingers were in such terrible perplexity; it was the prettiest thing to see her so confused and bashful, with the smiles and blushes playing brightly on her face, like the sparkling light upon the jewels; it was the prettiest thing that you would see, in the common experiences of a twelvemonth, rely upon it.

'The set of jewels and the wearer are so well matched,' said the old man, 'that I don't know which becomes the other most. Mr Westlock could tell me, I have no doubt, but I'll not ask him, for he is bribed. Health to wear them, my dear, and happiness to make you forgetful of them, except as a remembrance from a loving friend!'

He patted her upon the cheek, and said to Tom:

'I must play the part of a father here, Tom, also. There are not many fathers who marry two such daughters on the same day; but we will overlook the improbability for the gratification of an old man's fancy. I may claim that much indulgence,' he added, 'for I have gratified few fancies enough in my life tending to the happiness of others, Heaven knows!'

These various proceedings had occupied so much time, and they fell into such a pleasant conversation now, that it was within a quarter of an hour of the time appointed for dinner before any of them thought about it. A hackney-coach soon carried them to the Temple, however; and there they found everything prepared for their reception.

Mr Tapley having been furnished with unlimited credentials relative to the ordering of dinner, had so exerted himself for the honour of the party, that a prodigious banquet was served, under the joint direction of himself and his Intended. Mr Chuzzlewit would have had them of the party, and Martin urgently seconded his wish, but Mark could by no means be persuaded to sit down at table; observing, that in having the honour of attending to their comforts, he felt himself, indeed, the landlord of the Jolly Tapley, and could almost delude himself into the belief that the entertainment was actually being held under the Jolly Tapley's roof.

For the better encouragement of himself in this fable, Mr Tapley took it upon him to issue divers general directions to the waiters from the hotel, relative to the disposal of the dishes and so forth; and as they were usually in direct opposition to all precedent, and were always issued in his most facetious form of thought and speech, they occasioned great merriment among those attendants; in which Mr Tapley participated, with an infinite enjoyment of his own humour. He likewise entertained them with short anecdotes of his travels appropriate to the occasion; and now and then with some comic passage or other between himself and Mrs Lupin; so that explosive laughs were constantly issuing from the side-board, and from the backs of chairs; and the head-waiter (who wore powder, and knee-smalls, and was usually a grave man) got to be a bright scarlet in the face, and broke his waistcoat-strings audibly.

Young Martin sat at the head of the table, and Tom Pinch at the foot; and if there were a genial face at that board, it was Tom's. They all took their tone from Tom. Everybody drank to him, everybody looked to him, everybody thought of him, everybody loved him. If he so much as laid down his knife and fork, somebody put out a hand to shake with him. Martin and Mary had taken him aside before dinner, and spoken to him so heartily of the time to come, laying such fervent stress upon the trust they had in his completion of their felicity, by his society and closest friendship, that Tom was positively moved to tears. He couldn't bear it. His heart was full, he said, of happiness. And so it was. Tom spoke the honest truth. It was. Large as thy heart was, dear Tom Pinch, it had no room that day for anything but happiness and sympathy!

And there was Fips, old Fips of Austin Friars, present at the dinner, and turning out to be the jolliest old dog that ever did violence to his convivial sentiments by shutting himself up in a dark office. 'Where is he?' said Fips, when he came in. And then he pounced on Tom, and told him that he wanted to relieve himself of all his old constraint; and in the first place shook him by one hand, and in the second place shook him by the other, and in the third place nudged him in the waistcoat, and in the fourth place said, 'How are you?' and in a great many other places did a great many other things to show his friendliness and joy. And he sang songs, did Fips; and made speeches, did Fips; and knocked off his wine pretty handsomely, did Fips; and in short, he showed himself a perfect Trump, did Fips, in all respects.

But ah! the happiness of strolling home at night - obstinate little Ruth, she wouldn't hear of riding! - as they had done on that dear night, from Furnival's Inn! The happiness of being able to talk about it, and to confide their happiness to each other! The happiness of stating all their little plans to Tom, and seeing his bright face grow brighter as they spoke!

When they reached home, Tom left John and his sister in the parlour, and went upstairs into his own room, under pretence of seeking a book. And Tom actually winked to himself when he got upstairs; he thought it such a deep thing to have done.

'They like to be by themselves, of course,' said Tom; 'and I came away so naturally, that I have no doubt they are expecting me, every moment, to return. That's capital!'

But he had not sat reading very long, when he heard a tap at his door.

'May I come in?' said John.

'Oh, surely!' Tom replied.



'Don't leave us, Tom. Don't sit by yourself. We want to make you merry; not melancholy.'

'My dear friend,' said Tom, with a cheerful smile.

'Brother, Tom. Brother.'

'My dear brother,' said Tom; 'there is no danger of my being melancholy, how can I be melancholy, when I know that you and Ruth are so blest in each other! I think I can find my tongue tonight, John,' he added, after a moment's pause. 'But I never can tell you what unutterable joy this day has given me. It would be unjust to you to speak of your having chosen a portionless girl, for I feel that you know her worth; I am sure you know her worth. Nor will it diminish in your estimation, John, which money might.'

'Which money would, Tom,' he returned. 'Her worth! Oh, who could see her here, and not love her! Who could know her, Tom, and not honour her! Who could ever stand possessed of such a heart as hers, and grow indifferent to the treasure! Who could feel the rapture that I feel to-day, and love as I love her, Tom, without knowing something of her worth! Your joy unutterable! No, no, Tom. It's mine, it's mine.'

'No, no, John,' said Tom. 'It's mine, it's mine.'

Their friendly contention was brought to a close by little Ruth herself, who came peeping in at the door. And oh, the look, the glorious, half-proud, half-timid look she gave Tom, when her lover drew her to his side! As much as to say, 'Yes, indeed, Tom, he will do it. But then he has a right, you know. Because I AM fond of him, Tom.'

As to Tom, he was perfectly delighted. He could have sat and looked at them, just as they were, for hours.

'I have told Tom, love, as we agreed, that we are not going to permit him to run away, and that we cannot possibly allow it. The loss of one person, and such a person as Tom, too, out of our small household of three, is not to be endured; and so I have told him. Whether he is considerate, or whether he is only selfish, I don't know. But he needn't be considerate, for he is not the least restraint upon us. Is he, dearest Ruth?'

Well! He really did not seem to be any particular restraint upon them. Judging from what ensued.

Was it folly in Tom to be so pleased by their remembrance of him at such a time? Was their graceful love a folly, were their dear caresses follies, was their lengthened parting folly? Was it folly in him to watch

her window from the street, and rate its scantiest gleam of light above all diamonds; folly in her to breathe his name upon her knees, and pour out her pure heart before that Being from whom such hearts and such affections come?

If these be follies, then Fiery Face go on and prosper! If they be not, then Fiery Face avaunt! But set the crunched bonnet at some other single gentleman, in any case, for one is lost to thee for ever!