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READINGS AND SCENES

FROM

DAVID COPPERFIELD

SIXTEEN READINGS AND TWELVE SCENES
FOR TWELVE GIRLS

By

JAMES ELLA SELMAN



Price, 25 Cents

NEW YORK
EDGAR S. WERNER
1898

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CHARACTERS.

DAVID COPPERFIELD.
MASTER MICAWER.
MRS. COPPERFIELD, David's mother.
PEGGOTTY, David's nurse.
MRS. GUMMIDGE.
LITTLE EM'LY.
MRS. MICAWER.
MISS MICAWER.
BETSEY TROTWOOD.
JANET, her maid.
DORA SPENLOW.
AGNES WICKFIELD.

INTRODUCTION.

This arrangement of Dickens's favorite novel, "David Copperfield," is the outgrowth of a deeply-felt need, that the public exercises of our schools should combine the elements of true literary and popular taste. Good literary taste is essential for the culture of the pupils themselves, for the entertainment of the cultured friends of the institution, and for the instruction of the uneducated. But popular taste should not be disregarded, as it often happens that in deep sympathy with the joys and sorrows of humanity lies not only much of the success of the entertainment, but also much of the culture to the pupil. Heart-culture must go hand in hand with head-culture in true expression-work.

It is believed that "David Copperfield" combines perfectly these elements of literature and popularity.

The presentation of this arrangement by my pupils was received with such overwhelming praise and commendation that I feel assured that it will be welcomed by many teachers.

It is arranged to be presented by girls alone, and requires one hour and forty-five minutes for presentation.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

If presented on stage with drop-curtain, the reciter should stand before the curtain, in order that the stage-setting may be changed for the different scenes without loss of time. The scenes are so arranged that there need not be a minute of waiting throughout the program.

A long stage may be made very attractive by furnishing two-thirds of it as a reader's stage and enclosing the other third, by means of curtains, for the acting. Indeed, this is the preferable arrangement, as the readings make up the body of the entertainment, and the scenes serve mainly to brighten and relieve the program.

As a support for the curtain which divides the stage, stretch a wire from the front-curtain wire to a screw at the back of the stage. The curtains should be closed while the readers are telling the story, and promptly drawn open at the tap of a bell by the teacher or director, who sits behind a screen at the opposite side of the stage, to prompt the reader if such necessity should arise, and to tap the bell for the drawing of the curtains at the beginning and the end of scenes.

The reader's stage may be decorated by a tasteful arrangement of rugs, chairs, tables, lamps, and palms, or other floral decorations.

If the right hand side of the stage be curtained off, the readers enter from the left, and if the reading be interrupted by a scene, the reader retires to a settee at the left and back of the stage, and remains seated until bell taps for curtains to be closed, when the reader advances and resumes the reading.

Other directions will be given when needed, .

COSTUMES.

DAVID COPPERFIELD, a little girl (or boy) of about ten years of age, very slender and precocious, with demure looks and actions. He wears knee trousers, ruffled shirt of white muslin, vest of any color preferred, and an old-fashioned, long-tailed coat. Ruffles of white lace should be worn in the sleeves and at the knees.

MRS. COPPERFIELD, a very pretty girl who may even be conscious of her beauty. She should be small and girlish. Her hair is caught high with a tucking comb, while three or four precise curls fall to her shoulders. Her gown is a pretty, simple muslin with a long fichu about the neck.

PEGGOTTY should be large and stiff, and she must not despise the aid of pads and a bustle in her make-up. She wears a servant's cap, a short frock of red or some other bright color, white apron, neckerchief, and heavy shoes. Her manner is confident.

MRS. GUMMIDGE should be indeed a "lone lorn creetur." A slight girl of melancholy features will take the part well, but above all things she must be Mrs. Gummidge. She wears her hair powdered, a black cap with a bit of white lace next the face, a short black frock, white apron, white neckerchief with black border, and heavy shoes.

LITTLE EM'LY, a girl of ten with light hair. She wears a plain and faded calico dress and old shoes.

MRS. MICAUBER, a "thin and faded lady" with powdered hair and a careworn expression. She wears a plain calico or homespun dress, and a white apron. Her bearing should be that of one almost crushed by misfortune, but who still keeps her family pride. She carries THE TWINS in her arms. These are made-up babies dressed in long skirts and little caps.

LITTLE MISS MICAWBER and **MASTER MICAWBER** may be impersonated by any little children from three to five years of age. They should be dressed shabbily. They have no speaking to do, but add much to the effect of the Micawber home, and are useful for holding the babies when Mrs. Micawber wishes it.

BETSEY TROTWOOD is tall and angular, abrupt in manner. Her hair is powdered, she wears a lace cap, and in all scenes except the first in which she appears, she wears spectacles. Her gown is of lavender color, made with plain, full skirt and long basque and finished at neck and sleeves with black lace. She may wear a fan or a small black bag suspended by a ribbon from the waist.

JANET wears a plain shirt-waist and skirt, with white apron and servant's cap.

DORA SPENLOW is a plump pretty girl, with sparkling eyes and happy face. She has been greatly spoiled and petted. She wears a sheer blue lawn, made becomingly. Of course, Dora would not be Dora without Jip. There will be found in every community a playful, submissive little dog to take the part of Jip.

AGNES WICKFIELD is larger than Dora and a girl of much stability of character. Her face is beautiful with the reflection of a pure and noble spirit within. She has an ease and grace of manner which wins the hearts of all, and, as is most fitting to her purity of soul, is attired in simple white.

The costuming will be found an easy matter. The few articles that have to be purchased can be found in inexpensive material.

Much discretion should be used in the selection of characters and even more, I might say, in the choice of readers. The readings are of varied styles, and require more versatility and knowledge of all the elements of expression, than do the impersonations. The readings, as well as the impersonations, should be perfectly memorized, so that there will be no necessity for prompting.

PROGRAM.

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1.—My Earliest Recollections. | Name of Reader. |
| Scene I. The Crocodile Book. | |
| Scene II. A Very Pleasant Evening. | |
| Scene III. The Proposed Visit. | |
| Scene IV. The Boat House. | |
| Scene V. My First Grief. | |
| 2.—Miss Murdstone's Arrival. | Name of Reader. |
| 3.—My Lessons at Home. | “ “ “ |
| 4.—Barkis is Willin' | “ “ “ |
| 5.—(a) My Reception at School. | } “ “ “ |
| Scene VI. Take Care of Him, He Bites. | |
| (b) My Mother's Death. | |
| 6.—They Were Married. | “ “ “ |
| 7.—In the Service of Murdstone and Grimby. . | “ “ “ |
| Scene VII. I Never Will Desert Mr.
Micawber. | |
| Scene VIII. If You Please, Aunt. | |
| 8.—My School-Days at Canterbury. | “ “ “ |
| 9.—Dora and I Were Engaged. | “ “ “ |
| Scene IX. What Beautiful Flowers! | |
| 10.—My Aunt's Losses. | “ “ “ |
| Scene X. How It Happened. | |
| 11.—The Cookery Book. | “ “ “ |
| 12.—I Took Agnes to See Dora. | “ “ “ |
| Scene XI. Their Meeting. | |
| 13.—Dora and I Are Married. | “ “ “ |
| 14.—Our Housekeeping. | “ “ “ |

15.—My Child-wife is Dead.....Name of Reader.
 Scene XII. Dora and My Aunt.

16.—Agnes..... “ “ “

It will be found that some of the impersonations are very short, and in such cases the pupil taking the part may be assigned a reading also, provided the reading does not come so near to the impersonation as not to give time for change of costume.

DAVID COPPERFIELD.

1. MY EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS.

READING.

Looking back into the blank of my infancy, the first objects I can remember, as standing out by themselves, are my mother and Peggotty. Peggotty and I were sitting one night by the parlor fire alone. I had been reading to Peggotty about crocodiles. I was tired of reading, and dead sleepy; but having leave to sit up till my mother came home from spending an evening at a neighbor's, I would rather have died at my post than gone to bed. I propped my eyelids open with my two forefingers, and looked perseveringly at Peggotty, as she sat at work.

[*Bell taps and Reader retires to settee, while the curtains are drawn for Scene I.*]

Scene I.—The Crocodile Book.

The stage is set as "second-best parlor," with chairs, rugs, table, cabinet, etc., tastefully arranged. DAVID and PEGGOTTY are discovered near the front. DAVID is sitting with one elbow on the table, where a lamp is brightly burning, and holds the crocodile book on his knees. PEGGOTTY is sitting near by, knitting assiduously. DAVID yawns and stretches himself and begins the conversation.

DAVID. Peggotty, were you ever married?

PEGGOTTY [*with a start and stopping her work*]. Lord, Master Davy! What's put marriage in your head?

DAVID. But *were* you ever married, Peggotty? You are a very handsome woman, ain't you?

PEG. [*showing greater surprise*]. Me handsome, Davy! Lawk, no, my dear! But what put marriage in your head?

DAVID [*stretching and yawning*]. I don't know. You mustn't marry more than one person at a time, may you, Peggotty?

PEG. [*with promptest decision*]. Certainly not.

DAVID. But if you marry a person and that person dies, why then you may marry another person, mayn't you, Peggotty?

PEG. You may, if you choose, my dear. That's a matter of opinion.

DAVID. But what is your opinion, Peggotty?

PEG. [*suddenly rising and speaking with much emphasis*]. My opinion is that I never was married myself, Master Davy, and that I don't expect to be. That's all I know about the subject.

DAVID [*looking up in great surprise*]. You ain't cross, I suppose, Peggotty, are you?

PEG. [*throwing arms about David and turning over leaves of crocodile book*]. Lawk, no, my dear. Did you think your old Peggotty could be cross with you? Now let me hear some more about the crorkindills, for I ain't heard half enough.

[*Bell taps, curtains close, while Reader advances and continues.*]

READING.

The garden bell rang. We went out to the door, and there was my mother, looking unusually pretty, and with her a gentleman with beautiful black hair and whiskers, who had walked home with us from church last Sunday. As my mother stooped down on the threshold to take me in her arms and kiss me, the gentleman said I was a more highly-privileged little fellow than a monarch. I never saw such a beautiful color on my mother's face before.

"Let us say 'good night,' my fine boy," said the gentleman.

"Good night!" said I.

"Come! Let us be the best friends in the world!" said the gentleman, laughing. "Shake hands."

My right hand was in my mother's left, so I gave him the other. My mother drew my right hand forward, but I was resolved

not to give it him, and I did not. I gave him the other, and he shook it heartily and said I was a brave fellow, and went away.

Peggotty, who had not said a word or moved a finger, secured the fastenings instantly, and we all went into the parlor. My mother, instead of coming to the elbow-chair by the fire, remained at the other end of the room, and sat singing to herself.

[*Bell taps, curtains open, while Reader retires.*]

Scene II.—A Very Pleasant Evening.

DAVID is sitting with his head on the table, asleep; MRS. COPPERFIELD sits apart to the left and back of DAVID and sings softly any familiar love-song; PEGGOTTY stands in the middle of the room to the right and back of DAVID, holding a candle in her hand and looking as “stiff as a barrel.”

PEG. Hope you have had a pleasant evening, ma’am!

MRS. COPPERFIELD [*slowly returning from her abstraction*]. Much obliged to you, Peggotty, I have had a *very* pleasant evening.

PEG. A stranger or so makes an agreeable change.

MRS. C. A very agreeable change, indeed.

PEG. [*still standing motionless in middle of room, and emphasizing her speech with her candlestick*]. Not such a one as this, Mr. Copperfield wouldn’t have liked! That I say, and that I swear!

MRS. C. [*springing up and speaking angrily and tearfully*]. Good heavens! You’ll drive me mad! Was ever any poor girl so ill used by her servants as I am! How can you dare! You know I don’t mean how can you dare, Peggotty, but how can you have the heart—to make me so uncomfortable, and say such bitter things to me, when you are well aware that I haven’t out of this place a single friend to turn to.

PEG. [*growing more vehement and stamping*]. The more’s the reason for saying that it won’t do! No! That it won’t do! No! No price could make it do! No!

MRS. C. [*grows hysterical. DAVID wakes and looks in amazement from his mother to PEGGOTTY*]. How can you be so aggravating as to talk in such an unjust manner! How can you go on as if it was all settled and arranged, Peggotty, when I tell you over and over again, you cruel thing, that beyond the commonest civilities nothing has passed. You talk of admiration. What am I to do? If people are so silly as to indulge the sentiment, is it my fault? What am I to do, I ask you? Would you wish me to shave my head and black my face, or disfigure myself with a burn, or a scald, or something of that sort? I dare say you would, Peggotty. I dare say you'd quite enjoy it. [*PEGGOTTY is greatly affected, and sets her candle on table to dig her fist into her eyes and weep aloud. MRS. COPPERFIELD goes to DAVID and embraces him in his elbow-chair.*] And, my dear boy, my own little Davy! Is it to be hinted to me that I am wanting in affection for my precious treasure, the dearest little fellow that ever was?

PEG. Nobody never went and hinted no such thing.

MRS. C. [*rising and speaking with energy and tears*]. You did, Peggotty! You know you did! What else was it possible to infer from what you said, you unkind creature, when you know as well as I do, that on his account only last quarter I wouldn't buy myself a new parasol, though that old green one is frayed the whole way up, and the fringe is perfectly mangy. You know it is, Peggotty. You can't deny it. [*Kneeling and affectionately placing cheek against DAVID'S, who is sobbing pitifully.*] Am I a naughty mamma to you, Davy? Am I a nasty, cruel, selfish, bad mamma? Say I am, my child; say "yes," my dear boy, and Peggotty will love you, and Peggotty's love is a great deal better than mine, Davy. I don't love you at all, do I?

DAVID [*shrieking*]. Peggotty, you are a beast!

[*PEGGOTTY in deep affliction kneels in front of MRS. COPPERFIELD and DAVID, embracing both at once, and mingling her tears with theirs.*]

[*Bell taps, and Reader advances while the curtains are drawn.*]

READING.

We went to bed greatly dejected. My sobs kept waking me for a long time, and when one very strong sob quite hoisted me up in bed, I found my mother sitting on the coverlet, and leaning over me. I fell asleep in her arms after that, and slept soundly.

Gradually I became used to seeing Mr. Murdstone, the gentleman with the black whiskers. I liked him no better than at first, and had the same uneasy jealousy of him.

We were sitting as before, one evening (when my mother was out as before), in company with the stocking and the crocodile book, when Peggotty, after looking at me several times and opening her mouth as if she were going to speak without doing it, said, coaxingly.

[*Bell taps, curtains open and Reader retires.*]

Scene III.—The Proposed Visit.

Same as Scene I.

PEG. Master Davy, how should you like to go along with me and spend a fortnight at my brother's at Yarmouth? Wouldn't that be a treat?

DAVID. Is your brother an agreeable man, Peggotty?

PEG. Oh! What an agreeable man he is! 'Then there's the sea, and the boats and ships, and the fishermen, and the beach!

DAVID. It would indeed be a treat. But what would my mother say?

PEG. Why, then I'll as good as bet a guinea that she'll let us go. I'll ask her if you like as soon as ever she comes home. There, now!

DAVID. But what's she to do while we are away? She can't live by herself, you know. [PEGGOTTY *looks uneasy and does not reply.*] I say, Peggotty, she can't live by herself, you know.

PEG. Oh, bless you! Don't you know? She's going to stay

for a fortnight with Mrs. Grayper. Mrs. Grayper's going to have a lot of company.

DAVID. Oh! If that is it, I am quite ready to go.

[*Bell taps, curtains are drawn, and Reader comes forward and proceeds with story.*]

READING.

“Yon's our house, Master Davy.”

“That's not it,” said I, “that ship-looking thing!”

“That's it, Master Davy.”

If it had been Aladdin's palace, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it. The wonderful charm was that it was a real boat, which had no doubt been upon the water hundreds of times and which had never been intended to be lived in on dry land.

“Glad to see you, sir,” said Mr. Peggotty. “You'll find us rough, sir, but you'll find us ready.”

I thanked him, and replied that I was sure I should be happy in such a place.

We were welcomed by a very civil looking woman in a white apron. I soon found out that this was Mrs. Gummidge, and that she did not make herself so agreeable as she might have been expected to do, under the circumstances of her residence with Mr. Peggotty. Then there was a beautiful little girl, who wouldn't let me kiss her when I offered to, but ran away and hid herself. When the door was shut and all was made snug, it seemed to me the most delicious retreat that the imagination of man could conceive. Little Em'ly had overcome her shyness and was sitting by my side.

[*Bell taps, Reader retires, curtains open.*]

Scene IV.—The Boat House.

All pictures and ornaments are removed, and the room is comparatively cheerless. A bare table is in the centre, with candlestick and work-basket upon it. Fish-nets are hung upon the walls, and a pair of

oars are in the corner. Two plain, splint-bottom chairs are in the room at each side of the table and a little back of it. A little low bench is in front of the table, and somewhat to the left. PEGGOTTY is sitting to right of table, knitting; Mrs. GUMMIDGE to left, sewing; LITTLE EM'LY and DAVID on bench, playing with toy ship.

DAVID. You are quite a sailor, I suppose.

EM'LY. No. I'm afraid of the sea.

DAVID [*standing with bold air*]. Afraid! I ain't!

EM'LY. Ah! but it's cruel. I have seen it very cruel to some of our men. I have seen it tear a boat as big as our house all to pieces.

DAVID. I hope it wasn't the boat that—[*resuming seat*].

EM'LY. That my father was drowned in? No. Not that one. I never see that boat.

DAVID. My father is dead, too, and my mother and I have always lived by ourselves.

EM'LY. Your father was a gentleman and your mother is a lady; and my father was a fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my Uncle Dan is a fisherman.

DAVID. He must be very good, I should think.

EM'LY. Good? If I was ever to be a lady, I'd give him a sky-blue coat with diamond buttons, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money.

DAVID. You would like to be a lady?

EM'LY [*nodding*]. Yes. I should like it very much. We would all be gentlefolks together, then. Me, and my uncle, and Mrs. Gummidge. We wouldn't mind, then, when there come stormy weather. Not for our own sakes, I mean. We would for the poor fishermen's, and we'd help 'em with money when they come to any hurt.

[*The children continue their play.*]

MRS. GUMMIDGE. I am a lone lorn creetur and every think goes contrairy with me. It's so cold it gives me the creeps.

PEG. It is certainly very cold. Everybody must feel it.

MRS. G. [*more petulantly*]. I feel it more than other people.

Yes, yes. I know what I am. I know that I am a lone lorn creetur, and not only that everythink goes contrary with me, but that I go contrary with everybody. Yes, yes. I feel more than other people do, and I show it more. It's my misfortune.

PEG. Mrs. Gummidge, you must try to cheer up and not think about your troubles.

MRS. G. [*with much ominous head-shaking and weeping*]. I ain't what I could wish myself to be. I am far from it. I know what I am. My troubles has made me contrary. I feel my troubles and they make me contrary. I wish I didn't feel 'em, but I do. I wish I could be hardened to 'em, but I ain't. I make the house uncomfortable. I don't wonder at it. I've made you so all day, and Master Davy.

DAVID [*who has been listening in sympathetic amazement, on hearing his name, rushes up to MRS. GUMMIDGE*]. No, you haven't, Mrs. Gummidge!

MRS. G. It's far from right that I should do it. It ain't a fit return. I had better go into the house and die. [*Getting up very much overcome.*] I am a lone lorn creetur, and had much better not make myself contrary here. If thinks must go contrary with me, and I must go contrary myself, let me go contrary in my parish. I'd better go into the house and die and be a riddance. [*Walking petulantly across floor, as if to leave by right hand door.*]

PEG. [*shaking head*]. She's been thinking o' the Old Un.

[*Bell taps, curtains are drawn, and Reader goes on with the story.*]

READING.

The day came for going home. I bore up against the separation from Mr. Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge, but my agony of mind at leaving Little Em'ly was piercing.

The door opened and I looked half laughing and half crying or my mother. It was not she, but a strange servant.

“Why, Peggotty,” I said, ruefully. “Isn’t she come home?”

“Yes, yes, Master Davy,” said Peggotty. “She’s come home. Wait a bit, Master Davy, and I’ll—I’ll tell you something. Master Davy, what do you think? You have got a pa!”

Peggotty gave a gasp, as if she were swallowing something that was very hard, and, putting out her hand, said:

“Come and see him—”

“I don’t want to see him.”

“And your mamma,” said Peggotty.

I ceased to draw back, and we went straight to the best parlor, where she left me. On one side of the fire sat my mother; on the other, Mr. Murdstone. My mother dropped her work and arose hurriedly, but timidly, I thought.

“Now, Clara, my dear,” said Mr. Murdstone, “recollect, control yourself; always control yourself! Davy, boy, how do you do?”

I gave him my hand. After a moment of suspense, I went and kissed my mother; she kissed me, patted me gently on the shoulder, and sat down again to her work. I could not look at her, I could not look at him, I knew quite well that he was looking at us both. As soon as I could creep away, I crept upstairs.

[*Bell taps, curtains are drawn, and Reader retires.*]

Scene V.—My First Grief.

DAVID is discovered lying on floor, weeping aloud. In a few minutes PEGGOTTY and MRS. COPPERFIELD come running in.

PEG. Here he is!

MRS. C. David, what’s the matter?

DAVY [*sobbing and pulling loose from his mother*]. Nothing.

MRS. C. Davy! Davy, my child! [DAVID *crying and pushing his mother off*.] This is your doing, Peggotty, you cruel thing! I have no doubt at all about it. How can you reconcile

it to your conscience, I wonder, to prejudice my own boy against me, or against anybody who is dear to me! [*Vehemently.*] What do you mean by it, Peggotty?

PEG. [*lifting up hands and eyes*]. Lord forgive you, Mrs. Copperfield, and for what you have said this minute may you never be truly sorry.

MRS. C. [*wringing hands*]. It's enough to distract me! In my honeymoon, too, when my most inveterate enemy might relent, one would think, and not envy me a little peace of mind and happiness. [*Trying to be stern.*] David, you naughty boy! Peggotty, you savage creature! Oh, dear me! What a troublesome world this is, when one has the most right to expect it to be as agreeable as possible!

[*Bell taps, curtains are drawn, and Reader continues.*]

READING.

I felt the touch of a hand which I knew was neither hers nor Peggotty's and slipped to my feet. It was Mr. Murdstone's hand, and he kept it on my arm as he said:

“What is this? Clara, my love, have you forgotten? Firmness, my dear!”

“I am very sorry, Edward,” said my mother. “I meant to be very good, but I am so uncomfortable.”

He drew her to him, whispered in her ear, and kissed her. I knew as well, when I saw my mother's head lean down upon his shoulder and her arm touch his neck, I knew as well that he could mold her pliant nature into any form he chose, as I know, now, that he did it.

“Go you below, my love,” said Mr. Murdstone. “David and I will come down together.”

Peggotty, with some uneasy glances at me, courtesied herself out of the room.

“David, what is that on your face?”

“Dirt,” I said.

He knew it was the mark of tears as well as I. But if he had asked the question twenty times, each time with twenty blows, I believe my baby heart would have burst before I would have told him so.

“You have a great deal of intelligence for a little fellow,” he said, with a grave smile that belonged to him. “Wash that face, sir, and come down with me.”

“Clara, my dear,” he said, when I had done his bidding, and he walked me into the parlor with his hand still on my arm, “you shall not be made uncomfortable any more, I hope. We shall soon improve our youthful humors.”

NOTE.—Up to this point the reading has all been done by one person. However, it may be divided at the discretion of the teacher.

2. MISS MURDSTONE'S ARRIVAL.

After dinner, when we were sitting by the fire, and I was meditating an escape to Peggotty, a coach drove up to the garden gate. It was Miss Murdstone who was arrived, and a gloomy-looking lady she was; dark, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and voice. She was brought into the parlor with many tokens of welcome, and there formally recognized my mother as a new and near relation. As well as I could make out, she had come for good and had no intention of ever going again. On the very first morning after her arrival she was up and ringing her bell at cock-crow. When my mother came down to breakfast and was going to make the tea, Miss Murdstone gave her a kind of peck on the cheek, which was her nearest approach to a kiss, and said:

“Now, Clara, my dear, I am come here, you know, to relieve you of all the trouble I can. You're much too pretty and thoughtless”—my mother seemed not to dislike this character—“to have any duties imposed upon you that can be undertaken by me. If you'll be so good as to give me your keys, my dear, I'll attend to all this sort of thing in future.”

From that time, Miss Murdstone kept the keys, and my mother had no more to do with them than I had. One night when Miss Murdstone had been developing certain household plans to her brother, of which he signified his approbation, my mother suddenly began to cry and said she thought she might have been consulted.

“Clara!” said Mr. Murdstone, sternly. “Clara! I wonder at you.”

Going down next morning rather earlier than usual, I paused outside the parlor door, on hearing my mother’s voice. She was very earnestly and humbly entreating Miss Murdstone’s pardon, which that lady granted, and a perfect reconciliation took place. I never knew my mother afterward to give an opinion on any matter, without first appealing to Miss Murdstone.

3. MY LESSONS AT HOME.

There had been some talk on occasions of my going to a boarding-school. Mr. and Miss Murdstone had originated it, and my mother had, of course, agreed with them. Nothing, however, was concluded on the subject yet. In the meantime, I learnt lessons at home. Shall I ever forget those lessons! They were presided over nominally by my mother, but really by Mr. Murdstone and his sister, who were always present. Let me remember how it used to be and bring one morning back again.

I come into the second-best parlor after breakfast, with my books. My mother is ready for me at her writing-desk, but not half so ready as Mr. Murdstone, in his easy chair, or Miss Murdstone, sitting near my mother stringing steel beads. I hand the first book to my mother. I take a last drowning look at the page as I give it into her hand, and start off aloud at a racing pace while I have got it fresh. I trip over a word, Mr. Murdstone looks up. I trip over another word, Miss Murdstone looks up. I redden, tumble over half-a-dozen words, and stop.

I think my mother would show me the book if she dared, but she does not dare, and she says softly :

“ Oh, Davy, Davy ! ”

“ Now, Clara,” says Mr. Murdstone, “ be firm with the boy. Don’t say ‘ Oh, Davy, Davy ! ’ That’s childish. He knows his lesson, or he does not know it.”

“ He does *not* know it.” Miss Murdstone interposes, awfully.

“ I am really afraid he does not,” says my mother.

The despairing way in which my mother and I look at each other, as I blunder on, is truly melancholy. But the greatest effect in these miserable lessons is when my mother tries to give me the cue by the motion of her lips. At that instant, Miss Murdstone, who has been lying in wait for nothing else all along, says in a deep, warning voice :

“ Clara ! ”

My mother starts, colors, and smiles faintly. Mr. Murdstone comes out of his chair, takes the book, throws it at me or boxes my ears with it, and turns me out of the room by my shoulders.

One morning when I went into the parlor with my books, I found my mother looking anxious, Miss Murdstone looking firm, and Mr. Murdstone binding something round the bottom of a cane.

“ Now, David,” he said, “ you must be far more careful to-day than usual.”

He gave the cane a poise, and a switch ; and laid it down beside him, with an expressive look, and took up his book. This was a good freshener to my presence of mind. I felt the words of my lesson slipping off, not one by one, or line by line, but by the entire page. We began badly and went on worse. My mother burst out crying.

“ Clara ! ” said Miss Murdstone, in her warning voice.

“ Why, Jane, we can hardly expect Clara to bear, with perfect firmness, the worry and torment that David has occasioned her to-day. That would be stoical. Clara is greatly strengthened

and improved, but we can hardly expect so much from her. David, you and I will go upstairs, boy."

He walked me up to my room, slowly and gravely.

"Mr. Murdstone! Sir!" I cried to him. "Don't. Pray don't beat me! I have tried to learn, sir, but I can't learn while you and Miss Murdstone are by. I can't indeed!"

"Can't you indeed, David?" he said.

He cut me heavily an instant afterward, and in the same instant I caught the hand with which he held me, in my mouth, between my teeth, and bit it through. It sets my teeth on edge to think of it. He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death. Above all the noise we made, I heard them running up the stairs, and crying out. I heard my mother crying out and Peggotty. Then he was gone; and the door was locked outside; and I was lying fevered, and hot, and torn, and raging in my puny way, upon the floor. How well I recollect, when I became quiet, what an unnatural stillness seemed to reign through the whole house. How well I remember, when my smart and passion began to cool, how wicked I began to feel!

For the length of five days I was a prisoner. I saw no one but Miss Murdstone, when she brought me something to eat.

On the last night of my restraint, I was awakened by hearing my own name spoken in a whisper. I groped my way to the door, and putting my own lips to the keyhole, whispered:

"Is that you, Peggotty, dear?"

"Yes, my own precious Davy," she replied. "Be as soft as a mouse, or the cat'll hear us."

"What is to be done with me, Peggotty, dear? Do you know?"

"School. Near London," was Peggotty's answer.

"When, Peggotty?"

"To-morrow. You must never forget me. And I'll take

care of your mamma, Davy. And I won't leave her. And I'll write to you, my dear."

"Thank you, dear Peggotty," said I. And we both of us kissed the keyhole with the greatest affection. From that night there grew up in my breast a feeling for Peggotty which I can not very well define. She did not replace my mother; no one could do that; but she came into a vacancy in my heart, which closed upon her.

4. BARKIS IS WILLIN'.

Miss Murdstone was good enough to take me out to the cart, and to say on the way that she hoped I would repent before I came to a bad end; and then I got into the cart, and the lazy horse walked off with it. We might have gone about half a mile, and my pocket-handkerchief was quite wet through, when the carrier stopped short. Looking out to ascertain what for, I saw, to my amazement, Peggotty burst from a hedge and climb into the cart. She took me in both her arms, and brought out some paper bags of cakes, which she crammed into my pockets, and a purse which she put into my hand. After another squeeze with both arms, she got down from the cart and ran away, and my belief is, without a solitary button on her gown.

The carrier's name was Mr. Barkis. I offered him a cake as a mark of attention.

"Did *she* make 'em, now?" said Mr. Barkis.

"Peggotty, do you mean, sir?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Barkis. "Her."

"Yes. She makes all our pastry, and does all our cooking."

"Do she, though?" said Mr. Barkis.

He made up his mouth as if to whistle, but he didn't whistle. He sat looking at the horse's ears, as if he saw something new there. By and by he said:

"No sweethearts, I b'lieve?"

“Sweetmeats, did you say, Mr. Barkis?” For I thought he wanted something else to eat.

“Hearts,” said Mr. Barkis. “Sweethearts!”

“Oh, no. She never had a sweetheart.”

“Didn’t she, though?” said Mr. Barkis.

Again he made up his mouth to whistle, and again he didn’t whistle, but sat looking at the horse’s ears.

“Well. I’ll tell you what,” said Mr. Barkis. “P’r’aps you might be writin’ to her?”

“I shall certainly write to her,” I rejoined.

“Well, if you was writin’ to her, p’r’aps you’d recollect to say that Barkis was willin’, would you?”

“That Barkis is willin’? Is that all the message?”

“Ye-es,” he said, considering. “Ye-es. Barkis is willin’.”

“But you will be at Blunderstone again to-morrow, Mr. Barkis,” I said, “and could give your own message so much better.”

As he repudiated this suggestion, however, I readily undertook its transmission. While I was waiting for the coach at Yarmouth, I procured a sheet of paper and wrote a note to Peggotty, which ran thus: “My dear Peggotty: I have come here safe. Barkis is willing. My love to mamma. Yours affectionately. P. S. He says he particularly wants you to know, *Barkis is willing.*”

5. (a) MY RECEPTION AT SCHOOL.

I was sent to school in holiday time as a punishment for my misdoing. I gazed upon the schoolroom as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen. Suddenly I came upon a pasteboard placard, beautifully written, which was lying on the desk and bore these words: “*Take care of him. He bites.*”

I got upon the desk immediately, apprehensive of at least a great dog underneath. But, though I looked with anxious eyes, I could see nothing of him. I was still engaged in peering

about when Mr. Mell, one of the masters, came in and asked me what I did up there.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” says I, “if you please, I’m looking for the dog.”

“Dog?” says he. “What dog?”

“Isn’t it a dog, sir?”

“Isn’t what a dog?”

“That’s to be taken care of, sir; that bites.”

“No, Copperfield,” says he, gravely, “that’s not a dog. That’s a boy. My instructions are, Copperfield, to put this placard on your back. I am sorry to make such a beginning with you, but I must do it.”

With that he took me down and tied the placard, which was neatly constructed for the purpose, on my shoulders like a knapsack; and wherever I went, afterward, I had the consolation of carrying it. What I suffered from that placard, nobody can imagine. Whether it was possible for people to see or not, I always fancied that somebody was reading it. It was no relief to turn round and find nobody; for wherever my back was, there I imagined somebody always to be.

[*Bell taps, curtains are drawn, Reader retires.*]

Scene VI.—“Take Care of Him, He Bites.”

DAVID darts across stage with a white pasteboard placard on his back, bearing the inscription “Take Care of Him, He Bites,” printed in bold, black letters. He makes sudden turns as if afraid someone behind him were reading that shameful placard.

[*Bell taps, curtains close and Reader continues.*]

READING.

5. (b) MY MOTHER’S DEATH.

I pass over all that happened at school, until the anniversary of my birthday came round in March. It was after breakfast, and we had been summoned in from the playground, when Mr. Sharp entered and said:

“David Copperfield is to go into the parlor.”

I expected a hamper from Peggotty, and brightened at the order.

“Don’t hurry, David,” said Mr. Sharp. “There’s time enough, my boy, don’t hurry.”

I might have been surprised by the feeling tone in which he spoke, if I had given it a thought, but I gave it none until afterward. I hurried away to the parlor and there I found Mrs. Creakle with an open letter in her hand. But no hamper.

“David Copperfield,” said Mrs. Creakle, leading me to a sofa and sitting down beside me, “I want to speak to you very particularly. I have something to tell you, my child. You are too young to know how the world changes every day, and how the people in it pass away. But we all have to learn it, David.”

I looked at her earnestly.

“When you came away from home at the end of the vacation,” said Mrs. Creakle, “where they all well?” And after another pause, “Was your mamma well?”

I trembled without distinctly knowing why, and still looked at her earnestly, making no attempt to answer.

“She is very dangerously ill,” she added.

I knew all now.

“She is dead.”

There was no need to tell me so. I had already broken out into a desolate cry, and felt an orphan in the wide world. She was very kind to me. She kept me there all day, and left me alone sometimes; and I cried and wore myself to sleep and awoke and cried again. When I could cry no more, I began to think; and then the oppression on my breast was heaviest and my grief a dull pain that there was no ease for. If ever child were stricken with sincere grief, I was. I was to go home next night.

When we reached home, I was in Peggotty’s arms before I got to the door, and she took me into the house. Her grief burst out when she first saw me; but she controlled it soon, and spoke

in whispers and walked softly, as if the dead could be disturbed.

Mr. Murdstone took no heed of me when I went into the parlor where he was, but sat by the fireside, weeping silently and pondering in his elbow-chair. Miss Murdstone gave me her cold finger-nails, and asked me, in an iron whisper, if I had been measured for my mourning.

I said: "Yes."

"And your shirts," said Miss Murdstone; "have you brought 'em home?"

"Yes, ma'am. I have brought home all my clothes."

This was all the consolation that her firmness administered to me.

We stand around the grave. The day seems different to me from every other day, and the light not of the same color—of a sadder color. Now there is a solemn hush, and while we stand bareheaded I hear the voice of the clergyman, sounding remote in the open air, and yet distinct and plain, saying: "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord!" It is over and the earth is filled in, and we turn to come away. Before us stands our house, so pretty and unchanged, so linked in my mind with what is gone, that all my sorrow has been nothing to the sorrow it calls forth.

From the moment of my knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late had vanished from me. In her death she winged her way back to her calm, untroubled youth, and canceled all the rest. The mother who lay in the grave was the mother of my infancy.

6. THEY WERE MARRIED.

The first act of business Miss Murdstone performed when the day of solemnity was over was to give Peggotty a month's warning. As to me or my future, not a word was said or a step taken.

“Peggotty,” I said, one evening, “Mr. Murdstone likes me less than he used to. He never liked me much, Peggotty, but he would rather not even see me now, if he can help it.”

“I’m a-going, Davy, you see, to my brother’s for another fortnight’s visit. Now, I have been thinking that perhaps, as they don’t want you here at present, you might be let to go along with me.”

If anything could have given me a sense of pleasure at that time, it would have been this project of all others. To be sure, there was doubt of Miss Murdstone’s giving her consent, but even that was set at rest soon.

“The boy will be idle there,” said Miss Murdstone, “but it is of more importance than anything else that my brother should not be disturbed or made uncomfortable. I suppose I had better say yes.”

When the term of my visit was nearly expired, it was given out that Peggotty and Mr. Barkis were going to make a day’s holiday together, and that Little Em’ly and I were to accompany them. Peggotty was dressed as usual in her neat and quiet mourning, but Mr. Barkis bloomed in a new blue coat. Away we went, however, on our holiday excursion; and the first thing we did was to stop at a church, where Mr. Barkis tied the horse to some rails and went in with Peggotty. Mr. Barkis and Peggotty were a good while in the church, but came out at last, and then we drove away into the country. As we were going along, Mr. Barkis turned to me and said, with a wink:

“What name was it as I wrote up in the cart?”

“Clara Peggotty,” I answered.

“What name would it be as I should write up now?”

“Clara Peggotty, again?” I suggested.

“Clara Peggotty *Barkis!*” he returned, and burst into a roar of laughter that shook the chaise.

In a word, they were married, and had gone into the church for no other purpose.

7. IN THE SERVICE OF MURDSTONE AND GRIMBY.

And now I fell into a state of neglect that I can not look back upon without compassion. It seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little laboring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grimby, in London. Murdstone and Grimby's warehouse was at the water side. It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. My working-place was established in a corner of the warehouse. No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into companionship with the people of this warehouse. Mr. Murdstone had arranged that I should lodge with one Mr. Micawber. At the appointed time of the evening Mr. Micawber appeared.

Arrived at his house in Windsor Terrace he presented me to Mrs. Micawber, a thin and faded lady, not at all young, who was sitting in the parlor with a baby in her arms. This baby was one of the twins. There were two other children. In this house and with this family I passed my leisure time. A curious equality of friendship sprung up between me and these people, notwithstanding the ludicrous disparity in our years.

[*Bell taps, Reader retires and curtains are drawn.*]

Scene VII.—“ I Never Will Desert Mr. Micawber.”

MRS. MICAWBER with the twins, one leaning against her shoulder, the other lying in her lap; little MISS MICAWBER and MASTER MICAWBER engaged with their broken toys; DAVID seated in a straight chair listening to MRS. MICAWBER's doleful tale.

MRS. MICAWBER. I never thought before I was married, when I lived with papa and mamma, that I should ever find it necessary to take a lodger. But Mr. Micawber being in difficulties, all considerations of private feeling must give way.

DAVID. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. M. Mr. Micawber's difficulties are almost overwhelming just at present, and whether it is possible to bring him through them, I don't know. When I lived at home with papa and mamma, I really should have hardly understood what the word "lodger" meant, in the sense in which I now employ it.

DAVID. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. M. Master Copperfield, I make no stranger of you, and therefore do not hesitate to say that Mr. Micawber's difficulties are coming to a crisis.

DAVID. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. M. With the exception of the heel of a Dutch cheese, there is really not a scrap of anything in the larder. I was accustomed to speak of the larder when I lived with papa and mamma, and I use the word almost unconsciously.

DAVID. Are they dead, ma'am?

MRS. M. [*changing the babies about as if to keep them quiet*]. My mamma departed this life before Mr. Micawber's difficulties commenced, or at least before they became pressing. [*Weeping.*] My papa lived to bail Mr. Micawber several times, and then expired, regretted by a numerous circle.

DAVID. May I ask, ma'am, what you and Mr. Micawber intend to do?

MRS. M. My family are of opinion that Mr. Micawber should quit London and exert his talents in the country. Mr. Micawber is a man of great talent, Master Copperfield.

DAVID. Oh, I am sure of that.

MRS. M. Of great talent. My family are of opinion that, with a little interest, something might be done for a man of his ability in the Custom House. The influence of my family being local, it is their wish that Mr. Micawber should go down to Plymouth. They think it indispensable that he should be upon the spot.

DAVID. That he may be ready?

MRS. M. Exactly. That he may be ready in case anything turns up.

DAVID. And do you go too, ma'am ?

MRS. M. [*here she motions to little MISS MICAWBER to take one of the babies; the child walks up and down with the baby, and plays with it to keep it quiet*]. I never will desert Mr. Micawber. Mr. Micawber may have concealed his difficulties from me in the first instance, but his sanguine temper may have led him to expect that he would have overcome them. The pearl necklace and bracelets, which I inherited from mamma, have been disposed of for less than their value; and the set of coral, which was the wedding-gift of my papa, has been actually thrown away for nothing. But I never will desert Mr. Micawber [*weeping*], no, I never will do it. It's of no use asking me. [DAVID *is greatly distressed.*] Mr. Micawber has his faults. I do not deny that he is improvident. I do not deny that he has kept me in the dark as to his resources and liabilities, both, but I never will desert Mr. Micawber [*sobbing between words*], I—ne—ver—will—desert—Mr. Micawber.

[*Bell taps, curtains close, Reader continues.*]

READING.

I had grown to be so accustomed to the Micawbers, and had grown so intimate with them in their distresses, and was so utterly friendless without them, that the prospect of being thrown upon some new shift for a lodging and going once more among unknown people was like being that moment turned adrift. That there was no hope of escape from it, unless the escape was my own act, I knew quite well. I rarely heard from Miss Murdstone, and never from Mr. Murdstone; not the least hint of my ever being anything else than the common drudge into which I was fast settling down.

The very next day showed me that Mrs. Micawber had not spoken to me without warrant. My resolution was now taken.

“My dear young friend,” said Mr. Micawber, “I am older than you; a man of some experience in life, and—and of some

experience, in short, in difficulties. At present, and until something turns up (which I am, I may say, hourly expecting), I have nothing to bestow but advice. My advice is, never do to-morrow what you can to-day. Procrastination is the thief of time. Collar him. My other piece of advice, Copperfield, you know. Annual income, twenty pounds; annual expenditures, nineteen pounds, ought and six; result, happiness. Annual income, twenty pounds; annual expenditures, twenty pounds, ought and six; result, misery. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered, the god of day goes down upon the dreary scene, and—and, in short, you are forever floored, as I am.”

I did not fail to assure him that I would store these precepts in my mind.

“Master Copperfield,” said Mrs. Micawber, “God bless you. I never can forget you.”

“Copperfield,” said Mr. Micawber, “farewell. Every happiness and prosperity. If, in the process of revolving years, I could persuade myself that my blighted destiny had been a warning to you, I should feel that I had not occupied another man’s place in existence altogether in vain. In case of anything turning up (of which I am rather confident), I shall be extremely happy if it should be in my power to improve your prospects.”

I went to begin my weary day at Murdstone and Grimby’s, but with no intention of passing many more weary days there. No. I had resolved to run away. To go by some means or other, down into the country, to the only relation I had in the world, and tell my story to my aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood.

[*Bell taps, curtains open, Reader retires.*]

Scene VIII.—“If You Please, Aunt.”

The furnishings of the Copperfield home may be used, with the addition of a lounge placed near the front and a cabinet for medicine at the back. Window at back of stage is open. Miss BETSEY is seated with a book or sewing in her hands. Hearing a slight noise at the door, she looks round and sees DAVID entering, very ragged and travel-stained.

MISS BETSEY [*with violent gestures*]. Go away! Go along!
No boys here!

DAVID [*coming nearer, with humility and despair in his face*]. If you please, ma'am. [MISS BETSEY *is startled by the tone.*] If you please, aunt! [*Extending both hands.*]

MISS B. Eh! [*In amazement.*]

DAVID [*coming very near*]. If you please, aunt, I am your nephew!

MISS B. Oh, Lord! [*Throwing up hands and sitting flat down upon floor.*]

DAVID. I am David Copperfield, of Blunderstone. I have been very unhappy since my mother died. I have been slighted and taught nothing, and put to work not fit for me. [*Crying.*] It made me run away to you. I was robbed at first setting out, and have walked all the way, and have never slept in a bed since I began the journey. [MISS BETSEY *sits and stares while he tells his story. Touched by his tears, she gets up in haste, pulls him to lounge, and makes him lie down. She stands a little way off looking at him.*]

MISS B. Mercy on us! Mercy on us! [*After a little she rings bell and JANET appears.*] Janet, bring me some camphor and some brandy, quick! [JANET *obeys, getting bottles from cabinet; then she brings water, spoon, glass, etc. He is made to drink the brandy, and is vigorously rubbed with camphor.*] Land o' mercy! Janet, get a blanket! [JANET *returns with blanket and both tuck it snugly around him. MISS BETSEY falls despairingly into a chair.*] Janet, heat the bath! [JANET *goes out and returns with basin of water and towels and proceeds to bathe his face and hands. Meanwhile, MISS BETSEY exclaims:*] Mercy on us! Mercy on us! [*Suddenly she looks toward open window, her hands raised in horror.*] Janet! Donkeys! [JANET *rushes for broom and violently thrusts it out of window. She then goes back to DAVID, but MISS BETSEY lingers at window, looks out in every direction, and shakes fist at an imaginary*

donkey. Then she leaves window, stands behind DAVID'S couch, and looks at him, saying:] Poor fellow! Pretty fellow! [*She goes back to chair.*] Mercy upon us! [*DAVID is asleep while JANET bathes his forehead. MISS BETSEY screams.*] Janet! Donkeys! [*JANET brandishes broom and MISS BETSEY goes to window to assure herself that the enemy is out of sight. JANET removes bath, and MISS BETSEY walks up and down, soliloquizing.*] Whatever possessed that poor unfortunate baby that she must go and get married again, I can't conceive! And then goes and marries a murderer—or a man with a name like it—and stands in the child's light! And the natural consequence is, as anybody but a baby might have foreseen, that he prowls and wanders. [*Looking down upon him.*] He's as like Cain before he was grown up as he can be. And then there's that woman with the Pagan name, that Peggotty, she goes and gets married next. Because she has not seen enough of the evil attending such things, she goes and gets married next, as the child relates. [*DAVID awakes on hearing PEGGOTTY'S name.*] I only hope that her husband is one of those poker husbands who abound in the newspapers, and that he will beat her well with one.

DAVID [*sitting up*]. No, aunt, Peggotty was the best, the truest, the most faithful, the most devoted, the most self-sacrificing friend and servant in the world. She always loved me dearly and she always loved my mother dearly. [*Crying.*] She held my dying mother's head upon her arm.

MISS B. Well, well! The child is right to stand by those who have stood by him. Janet! Donkeys! [*JANET wields broom again.*]

[*Bell taps, curtains close, and Reader comes on.*]

READING.

8. MY SCHOOL-DAYS AT CANTERBURY.

I was now Trotwood Copperfield. I began my new life with a new name and with everything new about me.

“Trot,” said my aunt, one evening, “we must not forget your education.”

This was my only subject of anxiety, and I felt quite delighted by her referring to it.

“Should you like to go to school at Canterbury?” said my aunt.

I replied that I should like it very much, as it was so near her.

“Good,” said my aunt. “Should you like to go to-morrow?”

Being already no stranger to the general rapidity of my aunt’s evolutions, I was not surprised by the suddenness of the proposal, and said, “Yes.”

“Good!” said my aunt again. “Janet, hire the gray pony and chaise to-morrow morning at ten o’clock, and pack up Master Trotwood’s clothes to-night.”

She took me over to Canterbury and left me in charge of Mr. Wickfield, who had a big, old-fashioned house, kept by his little daughter Agnes, about my own age. My aunt was as happy as I was in the arrangement made for me. Next morning I entered on school-life again.

My school-days! The silent gliding on of my existence from childhood up to youth!

I am not the last boy in the school. I have risen, in a few months, over several heads. But the first boy seems to me a mighty creature, dwelling afar off, whose giddy height is unattainable. Agnes says “No,” but I say “Yes,” and tell her she little thinks what stores of knowledge have been mastered by the wonderful being at whose place she thinks I, even I, may arrive in time. Agnes is a sister to me and consoles with me and reads to me, and makes the time light and happy. Agnes has my confidence completely, always; I tell her all my grievances.

Time has stolen on unobserved. I am the head boy, now; and look down on the line of boys below me with a condescending in-

terest in such of them as bring to my mind the boy I was myself when I first came there. That little fellow seems to be no part of me. I remember him as something left behind upon the road of life, as something I have passed rather than have actually been, and almost think of him as of someone else.

And the little girl I saw on the first day at Mr. Wickfield's, where is she? Gone also. Agnes, my sweet sister, as I call her in my thoughts, my counselor and friend, the better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good, self-denying influence, is quite a woman.

What other changes have come over me besides the changes in my growth and looks, and in the knowledge I have garnered all this while? I wear a gold watch and chain, and a ring upon my little finger, and a long-tailed coat. Am I in love? I am. I worship the eldest Miss Larkins.

“Trotwood,” said Agnes, one day after dinner, “who do you think is going to be married to-morrow? Someone you admire.”

“Not you, I suppose, Agnes?”

“Not me. The eldest Miss Larkins!”

I am terribly dejected for about a week or two. I take off my ring, I wear my worst clothes, and I frequently lament over the late Miss Larkins's faded flower.

I am doubtful whether I was at heart glad or sorry when my school-days drew to an end. I had been very happy there, and I was eminent and distinguished in that little world. For these reasons I was sorry to go; but for other reasons I was glad. Misty ideas of being a young man at my own disposal, of the importance attaching to a young man at his own disposal, of the wonderful things to be seen and done by that magnificent animal, and the wonderful effects he could not fail to make upon society, lured me away.

My aunt and I had held many grave deliberations on the calling to which I should be devoted. For a year or more I had en-

deavored to find a satisfactory answer to her often repeated question what I should like to be.

“ Well, Trot,” she began one day, “ what do you think of the proctor plan? Or have you not begun to think about it yet?”

“ I have thought a good deal about it, my dear aunt, and I like it very much indeed. I like it exceedingly.”

“ Come!” said my aunt. “ That’s cheering. We’ll go to the Commons after breakfast to-morrow.”

At about midday, we set off for the offices of Messrs. Spenlow and Jorkins in Doctors’ Commons. It was settled that I should begin my month’s probation as soon as I pleased.

9. DORA AND I WERE ENGAGED.

On the day when I was articled, no festivity took place beyond my having sandwiches and sherry in the office for the clerks and going alone to the theatre at night.

Mr. Spenlow, in a week or two, said that if I would do him the favor to come down next Saturday and stay till Monday, he would be exceedingly happy. Of course, I said I *would* do him the favor; and he was to drive me down in his phaeton and to bring me back. The phaeton was a very handsome affair; the horses arched their necks and lifted their legs as if they knew they belonged to Doctors’ Commons. It was very pleasant going down, and Mr. Spenlow gave some hints in reference to my profession. There was a lovely garden to Mr. Spenlow’s house, and it was so beautifully kept that I was quite enchanted. We went into the house, which was cheerfully lighted up, and into a hall where there were all sorts of hats, caps, great-coats, plaids, gloves, whips and walking-sticks.

“ Where is Miss Dora?” said Mr. Spenlow to the servant.

“ Dora!” I thought. “ What a beautiful name!”

We turned into a room near at hand and I heard a voice say, “ Mr. Copperfield, my daughter Dora.” It was, no doubt, Mr. Spenlow’s voice, but I didn’t know it and I didn’t care whose it

was. All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora Spenlow to distraction. She was more than human to me. She was a fairy, a sylph, I don't know what she was—anything that no one ever saw and everything that everybody ever wanted. I was swallowed up in an abyss of love in an instant. I don't remember who was there except Dora. I have not the least idea what we had for dinner besides Dora. My impression is that I dined off Dora entirely, and sent away half-a-dozen plates untouched. I sat next to her. I talked to her. She had the most delightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways, that ever led a lost youth into hopeless slavery.

Within the first week of my passion, I bought four sumptuous waistcoats—not for myself; I had no pride in them; for Dora—and took to wearing straw-colored kid gloves in the streets, and laid the foundation of all the corns I ever had. If the boots I wore at that period could only be produced and compared with the natural size of my feet, they would show what the state of my heart was, in a most affecting manner.

When Dora's birthday arrived, Mr. Spenlow told me he would be glad if I would come down and join a little picnic on the occasion. I went out of my senses immediately. I think I committed every possible absurdity, in the way of preparation for this blessed event. I turn hot when I remember the cravat I bought. My boots might be placed in any collection of instruments of torture. At six in the morning I was in Covent Garden buying a bouquet for Dora.

[Bell taps, curtains are drawn, and DORA is seen sitting with Jip in her lap and holding a beautiful bouquet of flowers. The stage is set as in preceding scene excepting that a pretty rocker is placed in front and lounge is pushed into background. The Reader does not retire this time but continues the story, while DORA gives it in pantomime.

What a spectacle she was that beautiful morning, in a white chip bonnet and a dress of celestial blue!

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Copperfield! What dear flowers!” said

Dora. [*As Reader says these words, DORA holds flowers in front of her, and looks up and smiles as if in thanks for the flowers.*] To see her lay the flowers against her dimpled chin was to lose all presence of mind and power of language in a feeble ecstasy. [*DORA holds flowers to her face.*] Then Dora held my flowers to Jip to smell. Then Jip growled, and wouldn't smell them. Then Dora laughed and held them a little closer to Jip, to make him. Then Jip laid hold of a bit of geranium with his teeth. Then Dora beat him and pouted and said, "My poor beautiful flowers!" as compassionately, I thought, as if Jip had laid hold of me. [*The action here is suggested by the words.*] But now Mr. Spenlow came out of the house, and Dora went to him saying, "Look, papa, what beautiful flowers!" [*DORA rises and walks toward the door, holding out flowers.*] And we all walked toward the carriage, which was getting ready.

[*Bell taps, and curtains are drawn.*]

I shall never have such a ride again. I don't know how long we were going, and to this hour I know as little where we went. I drank in every note of her dear voice, and she sang to me who loved her, and all the others might applaud as much as they liked, but they had nothing to do with it! I was intoxicated with joy. I was happier than ever when the party broke up and the other people went their several ways.

When I awoke next morning I was resolute to declare my passion to Dora and know my fate. Happiness or misery was now the question. I don't know how I did it. I did it in a moment. I intercepted Jip. I told her how I loved her. I told her I should die without her. I told her that I idolized and worshiped her. Jip barked madly all the time. If she would like me to die for her, she had but to say the word and I was ready. Life without her love was not a thing to have on any terms. I couldn't bear it, and I wouldn't. The more I raved, the more Jip barked. Each of us, in his own way, got more mad every moment.

Well, well! Dora and I were sitting on the sofa by-and-by, quiet enough, and Jip was lying in her lap, winking peacefully at me. It was off my mind. I was in a state of perfect rapture. Dora and I were engaged.

10. MY AUNT'S LOSSES.

Going up to my room one day, what was my amazement to find, of all people upon earth, my aunt there, sitting on a quantity of luggage.

“My dear aunt!” cried I. “Why, what an unexpected pleasure! Let me draw the sofa here, or the easy chair. Why should you be so uncomfortable?”

“Thank you, Trot,” replied my aunt. “I prefer to sit upon my property. Trot, have you got to be firm and self-reliant?”

“I hope so, aunt.”

“What do you think?” inquired Miss Betsey.

“I think so, aunt.”

“Then why, my love, why do you think I prefer to sit upon this property of mine to-night?”

I shook my head unable to guess.

“Because,” said my aunt, “it’s all I have. Because I’m ruined, my dear!”

If the house and every one of us had tumbled out into the river together, I could hardly have received a greater shock.

“I am ruined, my dear Trot. All I have in the world is in this room, except the cottage; and that I have left Janet to let. We must meet reverses boldly and not suffer them to frighten us, my dear. We must learn to act the play out. We must live misfortune down, Trot.”

How exceedingly miserable I was that night. I had dreams of poverty in all sorts of shapes. Now I was ragged, wanting to sell Dora matches; now I was hungrily picking up crumbs that fell from old Tiffey’s daily biscuit; now I was hopelessly endeavoring to get a license to marry Dora. When I awoke, or, I should

rather say, when I left off trying to sleep, I saw the sun shining in through the window. Dressing myself as quietly as I could, I went for a walk. I was trying to familiarize my mind with the worst and to present to myself the arrangements we should have to make for the future in their sternest aspect, when a hackney chariot coming after me occasioned me to look up. A fair hand was stretched forth to me from the window, and the face I had never seen without a feeling of serenity and happiness was smiling on me.

“Agnes!” I joyfully exclaimed. “Oh, my dear Agnes, of all people in the world, what a pleasure to see you!”

“Is it indeed?” she said, in her cordial voice.

“I want to talk to you so much! It’s such a lightening of my heart only to look at you. If I had a conjuror’s cap, there is no one I should have wished for but you!”

“What?” returned Agnes.

“Well! perhaps Dora, first,” I admitted, with a blush.

“Certainly, Dora first, I hope,” said Agnes, laughing.

“But you next!” said I. “Where are you going?”

She was going to see my aunt. My aunt had written. We found her alone, and began to talk about our losses.

[*Bell taps, Reader withdraws, and curtains open.*]

Scene X.—How It Happened.

MISS BETSEY is sitting in an easy chair and AGNES on a low stool beside her. Otherwise the stage may remain the same as in preceding scene.

MISS B. Betsey Trotwood had a certain property. It don’t matter how much; enough to live on. More; for she had saved a little, and added to it. Betsey funded her property for some time, and then, by the advice of her man of business, laid it out on landed security. That did very well, and returned very good interest, till Betsey was paid off. I am talking of Betsey as if she was a man-of-war. Well! Then Betsey had to look about

her for a new investment. She thought she was wiser now than her man of business, who was not such a good man of business by this time as he used to be—I am alluding to your father, Agnes—and she took it into her head to let it out for herself. So she took her pigs to a foreign market; and a very bad market it turned out to be. First, she lost in the mining way; and then, she lost in the diving way. The bank was at the other end of the world and tumbled into space, for what I know; anyhow, it fell to pieces, and never will and never can pay sixpence; and Betsey's sixpences were all there. Least said, soonest mended. [Miss BETSEY *has been holding AGNES'S hand during last of her recital, and utters her last sentence with a look of triumph.*]

AGNES. Dear Miss Trotwood, is that all the history?

MISS B. I hope it's enough, child. If there had been more money to lose, it wouldn't have been all, I dare say. Betsey would have contrived to throw that after the rest and make another chapter, I have little doubt. But there was no more money and there's no more story. [*Taking AGNES'S hand and laughing.*] Is that all? Why, yes, that's all except "And she lived happy ever afterward." Perhaps I may add that of Betsey yet, one of these days.

[*Bell taps, curtains are drawn and Reader enters.*]

READING.

11. THE COOKERY BOOK.

Dora came to the drawing-room door to meet me. I soon carried desolation into the bosom of our joys by asking Dora, without the smallest preparation, if she could love a beggar? My pretty, little, startled Dora! Her only association with the word was a yellow face and a nightcap, or a pair of crutches, or a wooden leg, or something of that kind; and she stared at me with the most delightful wonder.

“How can you ask me anything so foolish!” pouted Dora. “Love a beggar!”

“Dora, my own dearest!” said I. “I am a beggar!”

“How can you be such a silly thing, as to tell such stories. I’ll make Jip bite you.”

“Dora, my own life, I am your ruined David!”

“I declare I’ll make Jip bite you, if you are so ridiculous.”

But I looked so serious that Dora left off shaking her curls and first looked scared and anxious and then began to cry. That was dreadful. I fell upon my knees before the sofa, imploring her not to rend my heart; but for some time poor little Dora did nothing but exclaim, “Oh, dear! oh, dear!” And “Oh, she was so frightened!” And “Go away, please! Don’t be dreadful!”

“I dreadful! To Dora!”

“Don’t talk about being poor and working hard! Oh, don’t, don’t!”

“My dearest love,” said I, “the crust well earned—”

“Oh, yes; but I don’t want to hear any more about crusts!” said Dora. “And Jip must have a mutton-chop every day at twelve, or he’ll die.”

I was charmed with her childish, winning way. I fondly exclaimed to Dora that Jip should have his mutton-chop with his accustomed regularity.

“My own! May I mention something?”

“Oh, please don’t be practical! Because it frightens me so!”

“If you will sometimes think, just to encourage yourself, that you are engaged to a poor man—”

“Oh, don’t! Pray don’t!” cried Dora. “It is so very dreadful.”

“My soul, not at all!” said I, cheerfully. “If you will sometimes think of that, and look about now and then at your papa’s housekeeping, and endeavor to acquire a little habit of—accounts,

for instance—it will be so useful to us afterward,” I went on. “And if you would promise me to read a little—a little cookery book that I would send you, it would be so excellent for both of us. For my path in life, my Dora, is stony and rugged now, and it rests with us to smooth it. We must fight our way onward. We must be brave.”

I was going on at a great rate, with a clenched hand and a most enthusiastic countenance; but it was quite unnecessary to proceed. I had said enough. I thought I had killed her this time. I sprinkled water on her face. I went down on my knees. I plucked at my hair. I denounced myself as a remorseless brute and a ruthless beast. I implored her forgiveness. When we were quite composed, Dora went upstairs to put some rose-water to her eyes, and returned looking such a lovely little creature that I really doubted whether she ought to be troubled with anything so ordinary.

12. I TOOK AGNES TO SEE DORA.

I took Agnes to see Dora. I had arranged the visit beforehand. I was in a flutter of pride and anxiety; pride in my dear little betrothed, and anxiety that Agnes should like her. All the way I pictured Dora to myself in every one of the pretty looks I knew so well; now making up my mind that I should like her to look exactly as she looked at such a time, and then doubting whether I should not prefer her looking as she looked at such another time, and almost worrying myself into a fever about it. I was troubled by no doubt of her being very pretty, in any case; but it fell out that I had never seen her look so well. Her charming little face was flushed, and had never been so pretty. But when we went into the room and it turned pale, she was ten thousand times prettier yet.

[*Bell taps, curtains open, and Reader continues, while DORA and AGNES enter together, DORA a little in advance.*]

Scene XI.—Their Meeting.

Dora was afraid of Agnes. [DORA looks shy.] She had told me that she knew that Agnes was “too clever.” But when she saw her looking at once so cheerful and so earnest and so thoughtful and so good, she gave a faint cry of pleased surprise, and just put her affectionate arms around Agnes’s neck and laid her innocent cheek against Agnes’s face. [*The words suggest the action.*]

I never was so happy. I never was so pleased as when I saw those two sit down together, side by side [*as these words are read DORA and AGNES sink upon a settee near front of stage, and express by looks and actions the sentiments uttered by the Reader*]; as when I saw my little darling looking up so naturally to those cordial eyes; as when I saw the tender, beautiful regard which Agnes cast upon her. Agnes’s quiet interest in everything that interested Dora; her manner of making acquaintance with Jip (who responded instantly); her modest grace and ease, eliciting a crowd of blushing little marks of confidence from Dora; seemed to make our circle quite complete.

[*Reader retires.*]

DORA. I am so glad that you like me. I didn’t think you would. I want to be liked.

AGNES. I am afraid that Trotwood has given me an unpromising character.

DORA. Oh, no! It was all praise. He thinks so much of your opinion that I was quite afraid of it.

AGNES. My good opinion can not strengthen his attachment to some people whom he knows; it is not worth their having.

DORA. But please let me have it, if you can. [AGNES *imprints a kiss on DORA’s cheek, while DORA nestles closer to her new-found friend.*]

[*Bell taps, curtains are closed, and Reader advances and continues.*]

READING.

We made merry about Dora's wanting to be liked, and Dora said I was a goose, and she didn't like me at any rate, and the short evening flew away on gossamer wings. The time was at hand when the coach was to call for us. Dora laughingly put Jip through the whole of his performances before the coach came. There was a hurried but affectionate parting between Agnes and herself; and Dora was to write to Agnes and Agnes was to write to Dora; and they had a second parting at the coach door, and a third when Dora would come running out once more to remind Agnes at the coach window about writing and to shake her curls at me on the box. Never, never had I loved Dora so deeply and truly as I loved her that night.

13. DORA AND I ARE MARRIED.

The realization of my boyish day-dreams is at hand. Yes! I am going to be married to Dora! I have never seen my aunt in such state. She is dressed in lavender-colored silk, and has a white bonnet on, and is amazing. Janet has dressed her and is there to look at me. Peggotty is ready to go to church, intending to behold the ceremony from the gallery. My aunt sits with my hand in hers all the way.

“God bless you, Trot! My own boy never could be dearer. I think of poor dear Baby this morning.”

“So do I. And of all I owe to you, dear aunt.”

The church is calm enough, I am sure; but it might be a steam-power loom in full action for any sedative effect it has on me. The rest is all a more or less incoherent dream. A dream of their coming in with Dora; of a pew-opener arranging us, like a drill sergeant, before the altar rails; of the clergyman and the clerk appearing; of Agnes taking care of Dora; of my aunt endeavoring to represent herself as a model of sternness, with tears rolling down her face; of little Dora trembling very much and

making her responses in faint whispers; of our kneeling down together, side by side; of Dora's trembling less and less, but always clasping Agnes by the hand; of the service being got through, quietly and gravely; of our all looking at each other in an April state of smiles and tears when it is over; of my walking so proudly and lovingly down the aisle with my sweet wife upon my arm, through a mist of half-seen people, pulpits, monuments, pews, fonts, organs and church windows, in which there fluttered faint airs of association with my childish church at home, so long ago; of their whispering, as we pass, what a youthful couple we are and what a pretty little wife she is; of our all being so merry and talkative in the carriage going back; of Agnes laughing gaily and of Dora being so fond of Agnes that she will not be separated from her, but still keeps her hand; of the pair of hired post-horses being ready, and of Dora's going away to change her dress; of Dora's being ready; of their all closing about Dora when at last she begins to say good-bye; of my darling being almost smothered among the flowers, and coming out, laughing and crying both together, to my jealous arms; of our going arm and arm, and Dora stopping and looking back and saying, "If I have ever been cross and ungrateful to anybody, don't remember it!" and bursting into tears.

We drive away together, and I awake from the dream. I believe it at last. It is my dear, dear, little wife beside me, whom I love so well!

14. OUR HOUSEKEEPING.

It was a strange condition of things, the honeymoon being over and the bridesmaids gone home, when I found myself sitting down in my own small house with Dora; quite thrown out of employment, as I may say, in respect of the delicious old occupation of making love. It seemed such an extraordinary thing to have Dora always there. I doubt whether two young birds could have known less about keeping house than I and my

pretty Dora did. We had a servant, of course. But she preyed upon our minds dreadfully. We felt our inexperience and were unable to help ourselves. We should have been at her mercy, if she had any; but she was a remorseless woman and had none. She was the cause of our first little quarrel.

“My dear life,” I said one day to Dora, “do you think Mary Anne has any idea of time?”

“Why, Doady?” inquired Dora, looking up, innocently, from her drawing.

“My love, because it’s five, and we were to have dined at four!”

Dora glanced wistfully at the clock, and hinted that she thought it was too fast.

“On the contrary, my love,” said I, referring to my watch, “it’s a few minutes too slow. Don’t you think, my dear, it would be better for you to remonstrate with Mary Anne?”

“Oh, no, please! I couldn’t, Doady!” said Dora.

“Why not, my love?” I gently asked.

“Oh, because I am such a little goose,” said Dora, “and she knows I am!”

“But, my love,” said I.

“No, no! please!” cried Dora. “Don’t be a naughty Blue-Beard! Don’t be so serious!”

“My precious wife, we must be serious sometimes. You know it is not exactly comfortable to have to go without one’s dinner. Now, is it?”

“N-n-no,” replied Dora, faintly.

“You must remember that I was obliged to go out yesterday when dinner was half over, and that the day before I was made quite unwell by being obliged to eat underdone veal in a hurry; to-day, I don’t dine at all, and I am afraid to say how long we waited for breakfast—and then the water didn’t boil. I don’t mean to reproach you, my dear, but this is not comfortable.”

“Oh, you cruel, cruel boy, to say I am a disagreeable wife?” cried Dora.

“ Now, my dear Dora, you must know that I never said that ! ”

“ You said I wasn't comfortable ! ”

“ I said the housekeeping was not comfortable. ”

“ It's exactly the same thing ! ” cried Dora.

“ I am not blaming you, Dora. We have both a great deal to learn. I am only trying to show you, my dear, that you must—you really must—accustom yourself to look after Mary Anne; likewise to act a little for yourself and me. ”

But I had wounded Dora's soft little heart and she was not to be comforted. She was so pathetic in her sobbing and bewailing, that I felt as if I had said I don't know what to hurt her. I was obliged to hurry away; I was kept out late; and I felt all night such pangs of remorse as made me miserable. I had the conscience of an assassin, and was haunted by a vague sense of enormous wickedness.

I had been married, I suppose, about a year and a half. After several varieties of experiment, we had given up the housekeeping as a bad job. The house kept itself, and we kept a page. The principal function of this retainer was to quarrel with the cook. This unlucky page was a source of continual trouble to me. He stole Dora's watch, which, like everything else belonging to us, had no particular place of its own. All this led me into some serious reflections and presented our mistakes in a new aspect, as I could not help communicating to Dora one evening, in spite of my tenderness for her.

“ My love, ” said I, “ it is very painful to me to think that our want of system and management involves not only ourselves but other people. ”

“ You have been silent for a long time, and now you are going to be cross ! ” said Dora.

“ No, my dear, indeed ! Let me explain to you what I mean. ”

“ I think I don't want to know, ” said Dora.

“ But I want you to know, my love. Put Jip down. ”

Dora put his nose to mine and said “ Boh ! ” to drive my seri-

ousness away, but, not succeeding, ordered him into his pagoda.

“The fact is, my dear,” I began, “there is contagion in us. We infect everyone about us. I begin to be afraid that the fault is not entirely on one side, but that these people all turn out ill because we don’t turn out well ourselves.”

“Oh, what an accusation, to say that you ever saw me take gold watches! Oh!”

“My dearest,” I remonstrated, “don’t talk preposterous nonsense. Who has made the least allusion to gold watches?”

“You did, you know you did. You said I hadn’t turned out well, and compared me to him.”

“To whom?” I asked.

“To the page; oh, you cruel fellow, to compare your affectionate wife to a transported page!”

“Now, Dora, my love; this is not only very ridiculous of you, but very wrong. In the first place, it’s not true.”

“You always said he was a story-teller,” sobbed Dora, “and now you say the same of me! Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!”

So ended my last attempt to make any change in Dora. It remained for me to adapt myself to my child-wife; to share with her what I could and be happy; to bear on my own shoulders what I must and be happy still.

15. MY CHILD-WIFE IS DEAD.

But as the year wore on, Dora was not strong. I do not know how long she had been ill. I was so used to it in feeling that I could not count the time. They had left off telling me to “wait a few days more.” I had begun to fear remotely that the day might never shine, when I should see my child-wife running in the sunlight with her old friend Jip. He was, as it were, suddenly grown very old. It might be that he missed in his mistress something that enlivened him and made him younger.

Dora lay smiling on us, and was beautiful, and uttered no

hasty or complaining word. She said that we were very good to her; that her dear, old, careful boy was tiring himself out, she knew; that my aunt had no sleep, yet was always wakeful, active and kind.

[*Bell taps, reader retires, curtains open.*]

Scene XII.—Dora and My Aunt.

Stage set as in preceding scene, DORA lying on her couch playing with Jip, and MISS BETSEY sitting in a chair by her side, sewing.

DORA. When I can run about again, as I used to do, aunt, I shall make Jip race. He is getting quite slow and lazy.

MISS B. I suspect, my dear, that he had a worse disorder than that. Age, Dora.

DORA. Do you think he is old? [*Voice weak and manner languid from illness.*] Oh, how strange it seems that Jip should be old!

MISS B. It is a complaint we are all liable to, little one, as we get on in life. I don't feel more free from it than I used to be, I assure you.

DORA. But Jip! Even little Jip. Oh! poor fellow!

MISS B. I dare say he'll last a long time yet, Blossom. He must have a piece of flannel in his house this winter, and I shouldn't wonder if he came out quite fresh again, with the flowers, in the spring. Bless the little dog! If he had as many lives as a cat, and was on the point of losing 'em all, he'd bark at me with his last breath, I believe!

DORA. Even little Jip! Oh! poor fellow!

MISS B. His lungs are good enough and his dislikes are not at all feeble. He has a good many years before him, no doubt. But if you want a dog to race with, Little Blossom, he has lived too well for that, and I'll give you one.

DORA. Thank you, aunt. But don't, please.

MISS B. No!

DORA. I couldn't have any other dog but Jip. It would be so unkind to Jip. Besides, I couldn't be such friends with any other dog but Jip, because he wouldn't have known me before I was married, and wouldn't have barked at Doady when he first came to our house. I couldn't care for any other dog but Jip, I am afraid, aunt.

MISS B. To be sure. You are right.

DORA. You are not offended, are you?

MISS B. [*caressing DORA*]. Why, what a sensitive pet it is! To think that I could be offended!

DORA. No—no—I didn't really think so, but I am a little tired, and it made me silly for a moment. I am always a silly little thing, you know, but it made me more silly to talk about Jip. He has known me in all that has happened to me, haven't you, Jip? And I couldn't bear to slight him because he was a little altered, could I, Jip? You are not so old, Jip, are you, that you'll leave your mistress yet? We may keep each other company a little longer.

[*Bell taps, curtains close, and Reader continues.*]

READING.

It is evening, and I sit by the bed. We have been silent, and there is a smile on her face.

“Doady!”

“My dear Dora!”

“You are very lonely when you go downstairs, now?” Dora whispers, with her arm about my neck.

“How can I be otherwise, my own love, when I see your empty chair?”

“My empty chair! And you really miss me, Doady? Even poor, giddy, stupid me?”

“My heart, who is there upon earth that I could miss so much?”

“Oh, husband! I am so glad, yet so sorry!”

It is night, and I am with her still. Agnes has arrived; has been among us for a whole day and an evening. She, my aunt and I have sat with Dora since the morning, all together. We have not talked much, but Dora has been perfectly contented and cheerful. We are now alone.

“I am going to speak to you, Doady. I am going to say something that I have often thought of saying lately. I don't know what you will think; perhaps you have often thought the same. Doady, dear, I am afraid I was too young. I was such a silly little creature! I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife.”

“We have been very happy, my sweet Dora.”

“Is it lonely downstairs, Doady?”

“Very! Very!”

“Don't cry! Is my chair there?”

“In its old place.”

“Oh, how my poor boy cries! Hush, hush! I want to speak to Agnes. When you go downstairs tell Agnes so, and send her up to me; and while I speak to her, let no one come—not even aunt. I want to speak to Agnes by herself. I want to speak to Agnes quite alone.”

Agnes is downstairs when I go into the parlor, and I give her the message. She disappears, leaving me alone with Jip. How the time wears I know not; until I am recalled by my child-wife's old companion. More restless than he was, he crawls out of his house, and looks at me, and wanders to the door, and whines to go upstairs.

“Not to-night, Jip! Not to-night!”

He comes very slowly back to me, licks my hand, and lifts his dim eyes to my face.

“Oh, Jip! It may be never again!”

He lies down at my feet, stretches himself out as if to sleep, and with a plaintive cry, is dead.

“O Agnes! Look, look here!”

That face so full of pity and of grief, that rain of tears; that awful, mute appeal to me, that solemn hand upraised toward heaven!

“ Agnes ?”

It is over. Darkness comes before my eyes, and, for a time, all things are blotted out of my remembrance.

16. AGNES.

I went away from England, not knowing, even then, how great the shock was that I had to bear. I left all who were dear to me and went away, and believed that I had borne it and it was past. As a man on a field of battle will receive a mortal hurt and scarcely know that he is struck, so I, when I was left alone with my undisciplined heart, had no conception of the wound with which it had to strive.

The knowledge came upon me not quickly, but little by little and grain by grain. A desolate feeling with which I went abroad deepened and widened hourly. At first, it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow, wherein I could distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees, it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost—love, friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered—my first trust, my first affection, the whole airy castle of my life; of all that remained—a ruined blank and waste lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark horizon.

From the accumulated sadness into which I fell, I had at length no hope of ever issuing again. I roamed from place to place, carrying my burden with me everywhere. I felt its whole weight now and I drooped beneath it, and I said in my heart that it could never be lightened.

When this despondency was at its worst, I believed that I should die. Sometimes I thought that I should like to die at home, and actually turned back on my road that I might get there soon. At other times, I passed on farther away, from city to city, seeking I knew not what and trying to leave I know not what behind.

For many months I traveled with this ever-darkening cloud upon my mind.

I was in Switzerland. I came, one evening, before sunset, down into the valley where I was to rest. In the course of my descent to it, by the winding track along the mountain-side, from which I saw it shining far below, I think some long-unwonted sense of beauty and tranquility, some softening influence awakened by its peace, moved faintly in my breast. I remember pausing once, with a kind of sorrow that was not all oppressive, not quite despairing. I remember almost hoping that some better change was possible within me. In this serenity, great Nature spoke to me, and soothed me to lay down my weary head upon the grass and weep as I had not wept yet since Dora died.

I had found a packet of letters awaiting me but a few minutes before, and had strolled out of the village to read. I opened it and read the writing of Agnes. She was happy and useful, that was all she told me of herself. The rest referred to me. She gave me no advice; she urged no duty on me; she only told me, in her own fervent manner, what her trust in me was. She knew, she said, how such a nature as mine would turn affliction to good. As the endurance of my childish days had done its part to make me what I was, so greater calamities would nerve me on to be yet better than I was. She commended me to God, who had taken my innocent darling to His rest, and in her sisterly affection cherished me always.

I put the letter in my breast and thought what had I been an hour ago! I wrote to her before I slept. I told her that I had been in sore need of her help; that without her I was not, and I never had been, what she thought me; but that she inspired me to be that, and I would try.

I did try. In three months more, a year would have passed since the beginning of my sorrow. The three months gone, I resolved to remain away from home for some time longer; to settle myself for the present in Switzerland, which was growing dear

to me in the remembrance of that evening. I can not penetrate the mystery of my own heart, to know when I began to think that I might have set its earliest and brightest hopes on Agnes. I can not say at what stage of my grief it first became associated with the reflection that, in my wayward boyhood, I had thrown away the treasure of her love. Whatever I might have been to her or she to me, if I had been more worthy of her long ago, I was not now. The time was past. I had let it go by and had deservedly lost her. I made no effort to conceal from myself now that I loved her, that I was devoted to her; but I brought the assurance home to myself that now it was too late, and that our long-subsisting relation must be undisturbed.

Three years had elapsed, when, at the same hour of sunset, and in the same place, I stood on the deck of the packet vessel that brought me home. Three years! Long in the aggregate, though short as they went by. And home was very dear to me, and Agnes, too. But she was not mine—she was never to be mine. She might have been, but that was past!

* * * * *

The opening of the little door in the paneled wall made me start and turn. Her beautiful, serene eyes met mine as she came toward me. She stopped and laid her hand upon her bosom, and I caught her in my arms.

“Agnes! my dear girl! I have come too suddenly upon you.”

“No, no! I am so rejoiced to see you, Trotwood!”

“Dear Agnes, the happiness it is to me to see you once again!”

She was so true, she was so beautiful, she was so good. I owed her so much gratitude, she was so dear to me, that I could find no utterance in what I felt. I tried to bless her, tried to thank her, tried to tell her what an influence she had upon me; but all my efforts were in vain. My love and joy were dumb.

With her own sweet tranquility she calmed my agitation and led me back to the time of our parting; spoke to me tenderly of

Dora's grave. With the unerring instinct of her noble heart, she touched the chords of my memory so softly and harmoniously that not one jarred within me; I could listen to the sorrowful, distant music, and desire to shrink from nothing it awoke. How could I, when, blended with it all, was her dear self, the better angel of my life?

"You remember when you came down to me in our little room, pointing upward, Agnes?"

"Oh, Trotwood!" she returned, her eyes filled with tears. "So loving, so confiding, and so young! Can I ever forget!"

"As you were then, my sister, I have often thought since, you have ever been to me. Ever pointing upward, Agnes; ever leading me to something better; ever directing me to higher things."

She only shook her head; through her tears I saw the same quiet smile.

"You are thoughtful to-day, Trotwood!"

"Agnes, shall I tell you what about? My dear Agnes, do you doubt my being true to you?"

"No!" she answered, with a look of astonishment.

"Do you doubt my being what I always have been to you?"

"No!" she answered, as before.

"You have a secret," said I. "Let me share it, Agnes."

She cast down her eyes and trembled. With an appealing, almost a reproachful, glance, she rose from the window, and hurrying across the room as if without knowing where, put her hands before her face, and burst into such tears as smote me to the heart. And yet they awakened something in me, bringing promise to my heart.

"Agnes! Sister! Dearest! What have I done?"

"Let me go away, Trotwood. I am not myself. I will speak to you by-and-by—another time. I will write to you. Don't speak to me now. Don't! don't!"

"Agnes, I can not bear to see you so and think that I have

been the cause. If you are unhappy, let me share your unhappiness. If you are in need of help or counsel, let me try to give it to you. If you have, indeed, a burden on your heart, let me try to lighten it. For whom do I live now, Agnes, if it is not for you?"

"Oh, spare me! I am not myself! Another time!"

"For heaven's sake, Agnes, let us not mistake each other after all these years and all that has come and gone with them! I must speak plainly. If you have any lingering thought that I could envy the happiness you will confer; that I could not resign you to a dearer protector, of your own choosing; that I could not, from my removed place, be a contented witness of your joy, dismiss it, for I don't deserve it!"

She was quiet now. In a little time she turned her pale face toward me and said, in a low voice, broken here and there, but very clear:

"I owe it to your pure friendship for me, Trotwood, to tell you, you are mistaken. I can do no more. If I have sometimes, in the course of years, wanted help and counsel, they have come to me. If I have sometimes been unhappy, the feeling has passed away. If I have ever had a burden on my heart, it has been lightened for me. If I have any secret, it is no new one and is not what you suppose. I can not reveal it or divide it. It has long been mine, and must remain mine."

"Agnes! Stay! A moment! Dearest Agnes, whom I so respect and honor, whom I so devotedly love! When I came here to-day, I thought that nothing could have wrested this confession from me. I thought I could have kept it in my bosom all our lives, till we were old. But, Agnes, if I have, indeed, any new-born hope it is that I may call you something more than sister, widely different from sister."

Her tears fell fast; but they were not like those she had lately shed, and I saw my hope brightening in them.

"When I loved Dora—fondly, Agnes, as you know—even

then my love would have been incomplete without your sympathy. I had it and it was perfected. And when I lost her, Agnes, what should I have been without you still? I went away, dear Agnes, loving you. I stayed away, loving you. I returned home, loving you!"

We walked that winter evening in the fields together, and the blessed calm within us seemed to be partaken of by the frosty air. The early stars began to shine while we were lingering on, and looking up to them we thanked our God for having guided us to this tranquility.

CURTAIN.



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