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the old curiosity shop is a beautiful novel written by the famous author charles dickens. the book is perfect for those who wants to read fiction, literature books.

the main character of the story are barbara, nell trent, nell's grandfather, christopher 'kit' nubbles, daniel quilp. the book was first published in 1840 and the latest edition of the book was published in january 25th 2001 which eliminates all the known issues and printing errors.

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the old curiosity shop

by charles dickens

chapter 1

night is generally my time for walking. in the summer i often leave

home early in the morning, and roam about fields and lanes all day,

or even escape for days or weeks together; but, saving in the

country, i seldom go out until after dark, though, heaven be thanked, i love its light and feel the cheerfulness it sheds upon the

earth, as much as any creature living.

i have fallen insensibly into this habit, both because it favours my

infirmity and because it affords me greater opportunity of speculating

on the characters and occupations of those who fill the streets. the

glare and hurry of broad noon are not adapted to idle pursuits like

mine; a glimpse of passing faces caught by the light of a street-lamp

or a shop window is often better for my purpose than their full

revelation in the daylight; and, if i must add the truth, night is kinder

in this respect than day, which too often destroys an air-built castle

at the moment of its completion, without the least ceremony or remorse.

that constant pacing to and fro, that never-ending restlessness, that

incessant tread of feet wearing the rough stones smooth and glossy--is it

not a wonder how the dwellers in narrow ways can bear to hear

it! think of a sick man in such a place as saint martin's court, listening to the footsteps, and in the midst of pain and weariness

obliged, despite himself (as though it were a task he must perform)

to detect the child's step from the man's, the slipshod beggar from

the booted exquisite, the lounging from the busy, the dull heel

of the sauntering outcast from the quick tread of an expectant

pleasure-seeker--think of the hum and noise always being present to his

sense, and of the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on,

through all his restless dreams, as if he were condemned to lie,

dead but conscious, in a noisy churchyard, and had no hope of rest

for centuries to come.

then, the crowds for ever passing and repassing on the bridges (on

those which are free of toil at last), where many stop on fine evenings looking listlessly down upon the water with some vague

idea that by and by it runs between green banks which grow wider

and wider until at last it joins the broad vast sea--where some halt to

rest from heavy loads and think as they look over the parapet that to

smoke and lounge away one's life, and lie sleeping in the sun upon a

hot tarpaulin, in a dull, slow, sluggish barge, must be happiness

unalloyed--and where some, and a very different class, pause with

heaver loads than they, remembering to have heard or read in old

time that drowning was not a hard death, but of all means of suicide

the easiest and best.

covent garden market at sunrise too, in the spring or summer, when

the fragrance of sweet flowers is in the air, over-powering even the

unwholesome streams of last night's debauchery, and driving the

dusky thrush, whose cage has hung outside a garret window all night

long, half mad with joy! poor bird! the only neighbouring thing, at all

akin to the other little captives, some of whom, shrinking from the

hot hands of drunken purchasers, lie drooping on the path already,

while others, soddened by close contact, await the time when they

shall be watered and freshened up to please more sober company,

and make old clerks who pass them on their road to business,

wonder what has filled their breasts with visions of the country.

but my present purpose is not to expatiate upon my walks. the story

i am about to relate, and to which i shall recur at intervals, arose

out of one of these rambles; and thus i have been led to speak of

them by way of preface.

one night i had roamed into the city, and was walking slowly on in

my usual way, musing upon a great many things, when i was

arrested by an inquiry, the purport of which did not reach me, but

which seemed to be addressed to myself, and was preferred in a soft

sweet voice that struck me very pleasantly. i turned hastily round

and found at my elbow a pretty little girl, who begged to be directed

to a certain street at a considerable distance, and indeed in quite

another quarter of the town.

it is a very long way from here,' said i, 'my child.'

'i know that, sir,' she replied timidly. 'i am afraid it is a very long

way, for i came from there to-night.'

'alone?' said i, in some surprise.

'oh, yes, i don't mind that, but i am a little frightened now, for i

had lost my road.'

'and what made you ask it of me? suppose i should tell you wrong?'

'i am sure you will not do that,' said the little creature,' you are such

a very old gentleman, and walk so slow yourself.'

i cannot describe how much i was impressed by this appeal and the

child's

clear eye, and made her slight figure tremble as she looked up into

my face.

'come,' said i, 'i'll take you there.'

she put her hand in mind as confidingly as if she had known me

from her cradle, and we trudged away together; the little creature

accommodating her pace to mine, and rather seeming to lead and

take care of me than i to be protecting her. i observed that every

now and then she stole a curious look at my face, as if to make quite

sure that i was not deceiving her, and that these glances (very sharp

and keen they were too) seemed to increase her confidence at every

repetition.

for my part, my curiosity and interest were at least equal to the

child's, for child she certainly was, although i thought it probably

from what i could make out, that her very small and delicate frame

imparted a peculiar youthfulness to her appearance. though more

scantily attired than she might have been she was dressed with

perfect neatness, and betrayed no marks of poverty or neglect.

'who has sent you so far by yourself?' said i.

'someone who is very kind to me, sir.'

'and what have you been doing?'

'that, i must not tell,' said the child firmly.

there was something in the manner of this reply which caused me to

look at the little creature with an involuntary expression of surprise;

for i wondered what kind of errand it might be that occasioned her to

be prepared for questioning. her quick eye seemed to read my

thoughts, for as it met mine she added that there was no harm in

what she had been doing, but it was a great secret--a secret which

she did not even know herself.

this was said with no appearance of cunning or deceit, but with an

unsuspicious frankness that bore the impress of truth. she walked on

as before, growing more familiar with me as we proceeded and

talking cheerfully by the way, but she said no more about her home,

beyond remarking that we were going quite a new road and asking if

it were a short one.

while we were thus engaged, i revolved in my mind a hundred

different explanations of the riddle and rejected them every one. i

really felt ashamed to take advantage of the ingenuousness or grateful

feeling of the child for the purpose of gratifying my curiosity. i love

these little people; and it is not a slight thing when they, who are so

fresh from god, love us. as i had felt pleased at first by her confidence i determined to deserve it, and to do credit to the nature

which had prompted her to repose it in me.

there was no reason, however, why i should refrain from seeing the

person who had inconsiderately sent her to so great a distance by

night and alone, and as it was not improbable that if she found

herself near home she might take farewell of me and deprive me of

the opportunity, i avoided the most frequented ways and took the

most intricate, and thus it was not until we arrived in the street itself

that she knew where we were. clapping her hands with pleasure and

running on before me for a short distance, my little acquaintance

stopped at a door and remaining on the step till i came up knocked at

it when i joined her.

a part of this door was of glass unprotected by any shutter, which i

did not observe at first, for all was very dark and silent within, and i

was anxious (as indeed the child was also) for an answer to our

summons. when she had knocked twice or thrice there was a noise

as if some person were moving inside, and at length a faint light

appeared through the glass which, as it approached very slowly, the

bearer having to make his way through a great many scattered

articles, enabled me to see both what kind of person it was who

advanced and what kind of place it was through which he came.

it was an old man with long grey hair, whose face and figure as he

held the light above his head and looked before him as he approached, i could plainly see. though much altered by

age, i fancied i could recognize in his spare and slender form something of

that delicate mould which i had noticed in a child. their bright blue

eyes were certainly alike, but his face was so deeply furrowed and so

very full of care, that here all resemblance ceased.

the place through which he made his way at leisure was one of those

receptacles for old and curious things which seem to crouch in odd

corners of this town and to hide their musty treasures from the public

eye in jealousy and distrust. there were suits of mail standing like

ghosts in armour here and there, fantastic carvings brought from monkish cloisters, rusty weapons of various kinds, distorted figures in china and wood and iron and ivory: tapestry and strange furniture that might have been designed in dreams. the haggard aspect of the little old man was wonderfully suited to the place; he might have groped among old churches and tombs and deserted houses and gathered all the spoils with his own hands. there was nothing in the whole collection but was in keeping with himself nothing that looked older or more worn than he.

as he turned the key in the lock, he surveyed me with some astonishment which was not diminished when he looked from me to my companion. the door being opened, the child addressed him as grandfather, and told him the little story of our companionship.

'why, bless thee, child,' said the old man, patting her on the head, 'how couldst thou miss thy way? what if i had lost thee, nell!'

'i would have found my way back to you, grandfather,' said the child boldly; 'never fear.'

the old man kissed her, then turning to me and begging me to walk in, i did so. the door was closed and locked. preceding me with the light, he led me through the place i had already seen from without, into a small sitting-room behind, in which was another door opening into a kind of closet, where i saw a little bed that a fairy might have slept in, it looked so very small and was so prettily arranged. the child took a candle and tripped into this little room, leaving the old man and me together.

'you must be tired, sir,' said he as he placed a chair near the fire, 'how can i thank you?'

'by taking more care of your grandchild another time, my good friend,' i replied.

'more care!' said the old man in a shrill voice, 'more care of nelly! why, who ever loved a child as i love nell?'

he said this with such evident surprise that i was perplexed what answer to make, and the more so because coupled with something feeble and wandering in his manner, there were in his face marks of deep and anxious thought which convinced me that he could not be, as i had been at first inclined to suppose, in a state of dotage or imbecility.

'i don't think you consider--' i began.

'i don't consider!' cried the old man interrupting me, 'i don't consider her! ah, how little you know of the truth! little nelly, little nelly!'

it would be impossible for any man, i care not what his form of speech might be, to express more affection than the dealer in curiosities did, in these four words. i waited for him to speak again, but he rested his chin upon his hand and shaking his head twice or thrice fixed his eyes upon the fire.

while we were sitting thus in silence, the door of the closet opened, and the child returned, her light brown hair hanging loose about her neck, and her face flushed with the haste she had made to rejoin us. she busied herself immediately in preparing supper, and while she was thus engaged i remarked that the old man took an opportunity of observing me more closely than he had done yet. i was surprised to see that all this time everything was done by the child, and that there appeared to be no other persons but ourselves in the house. i took advantage of a moment when she was absent to venture a hint on this point, to which the old man replied that there were few grown persons as trustworthy or as careful as she.

'it always grieves me, ' i observed, roused by what i took to be his selfishness, 'it always grieves me to contemplate the initiation of children into the ways of life, when they are scarcely more than infants. it checks their confidence and simplicity--two of the best qualities that heaven gives them--and demands that they share our sorrows before they are capable of entering into our enjoyments.'

'it will never check hers,' said the old man looking steadily at me, 'the springs are too deep. besides, the children of the poor know but few pleasures. even the cheap delights of childhood must be bought and paid for.'

'but--forgive me for saying this--you are surely not so very poor'--said i.

'she is not my child, sir,' returned the old man. 'her mother was, and she was poor. i save nothing--not a penny--though i live as you see, but'--he laid his hand upon my arm and leant forward to whisper--'she shall be rich one of these days, and a fine lady. don't you think ill of me because i use her help. she gives it cheerfully as you see, and it would break her heart if she knew that i suffered anybody else to do for me what her little hands could undertake. i don't consider!'--he cried with sudden querulousness, 'why, god knows that this one child is there thought and object of my life, and yet he never prospers me--no, never!'

at this juncture, the subject of our conversation again returned, and the old men motioning to me to approach the table, broke off, and said no more.

we had scarcely begun our repast when there was a knock at the door by which i had entered, and nell bursting into a hearty laugh, which i was rejoiced to hear, for it was childlike and full of hilarity, said it was no doubt dear old kit coming back at last.

'foolish nell!' said the old man fondling with her hair. 'she always laughs at poor kit.'

the child laughed again more heartily than before, i could not help smiling from pure sympathy. the little old man took up a candle and went to open the door. when he came back, kit was at his heels.

kit was a shock-headed, shambling, awkward lad with an uncommonly wide mouth, very red cheeks, a turned-up nose, and certainly the most comical expression of face i ever saw. he stopped short at the door on seeing a stranger, twirled in his hand a perfectly round old hat without any vestige of a brim, and resting himself now on one leg and now on the other and changing them constantly, stood in the doorway, looking into the parlour with the most extraordinary leer i ever beheld. i entertained a grateful feeling towards the boy from that minute, for i felt that he was the comedy of the child's life.

'a long way, wasn't it, kit?' said the little old man.

'why, then, it was a goodish stretch, master,' returned kit.

'of course you have come back hungry?'

'why, then, i do consider myself rather so, master,' was the answer.

the lad had a remarkable manner of standing sideways as he spoke, and thrusting his head forward over his shoulder, as if he could not get at his voice without that accompanying action. i think he would have amused one anywhere, but the child's exquisite enjoyment of his oddity, and the relief it was to find that there was something she associated with merriment in a place that appeared so unsuited to her, were quite irresistible. it was a great point too that kit himself was flattered by the sensation he created, and after several efforts to preserve his gravity, burst into a loud roar, and so stood with his mouth wide open and his eyes nearly shut, laughing violently.

the old man had again relapsed into his former abstraction and took no notice of what passed, but i remarked that when her laugh was over, the child's bright eyes were dimmed with tears, called forth by the fullness of heart with which she welcomed her uncouth favourite after the little anxiety of the night. as for kit himself (whose laugh had been all the time one of that sort which very little would change into a cry) he carried a large slice of bread and meat and a mug of beer into a corner, and applied himself to disposing of them with great voracity.

'ah!' said the old man turning to me with a sigh, as if i had spoken to him but that moment, 'you don't know what you say when you tell me that i don't consider her.'

'you must not attach too great weight to a remark founded on first appearances, my friend,' said i.

'no,' returned the old man thoughtfully, 'no. come hither, nell.'

the little girl hastened from her seat, and put her arm about his neck.

'do i love thee, nell?' said he. 'say--do i love thee, nell, or no?'

the child only answered by her caresses, and laid her head upon his breast.

'why dost thou sob?' said the grandfather, pressing her closer to him and glancing towards me. 'is it because thou know'st i love thee, and dost not like that i should seem to doubt it by my question? well, well--then let us say i love thee dearly.'

'indeed, indeed you do,' replied the child with great earnestness, 'kit knows you do.'

kit, who in despatching his bread and meat had been swallowing two-thirds of his knife at every mouthful with the coolness of a juggler, stopped short in his operations on being thus appealed to, and bawled 'nobody isn't such a fool as to say he doesn't,' after which he incapacitated himself for further conversation by taking a most prodigious sandwich at one bite.

'she is poor now'--said the old men, patting the child's cheek, 'but i say again that the time is coming when she shall be rich. it has been a long time coming, but it must come at last; a very long time, but it surely must come. it has come to other men who do nothing but waste and riot. when will it come to me!'

'i am very happy as i am, grandfather,' said the child.

'tush, tush!' returned the old man, 'thou dost not know--how should'st thou! then he muttered again between his teeth, 'the time must come, i am very sure it must. it will be all the better for coming late'; and then he sighed and fell into his former musing state, and still holding the child between his knees appeared to be insensible to everything around him. by this time it wanted but a few minutes of midnight and i rose to go, which recalled him to himself.

'one moment, sir,' he said, 'now, kit--near midnight, boy, and you still here! get home, get home, and be true to your time in the morning, for there's work to do. good night! there, bid him good night, nell, and let him be gone!'

'good night, kit,' said the child, her eyes lighting up with merriment and kindness.'

'good night, miss nell,' returned the boy.

'and thank this gentleman,' interposed the old man, 'but for whose care i might have lost my little girl to-night.'

'no, no, master,' said kit, 'that won't do, that won't.'

'what do you mean?' cried the old man.

'i'd have found her, master,' said kit, 'i'd have found her. i'll bet that i'd find her if she was above ground, i would, as quick as anybody, master. ha, ha, ha!'

once more opening his mouth and shutting his eyes, and laughing like a stentor, kit gradually backed to the door, and roared himself out.

free of the room, the boy was not slow in taking his departure; when he had gone, and the child was occupied in clearing the table, the old man said:

'i haven't seemed to thank you, sir, for what you have done to-night, but i do thank you humbly and heartily, and so does she, and her thanks are better worth than mine. i should be sorry that you went away, and thought i was unmindful of your goodness, or careless of

her--i am not indeed.'

i was sure of that, i said, from what i had seen. 'but,' i added, 'may i ask you a question?'

'ay, sir,' replied the old man, 'what is it?'

'this delicate child,' said i, 'with so much beauty and intelligence--has she nobody to care for her but you? has she no other companion or advisor?'

'no,' he returned, looking anxiously in my face, 'no, and she wants no other.'

'but are you not fearful,' said i, 'that you may misunderstand a charge so tender? i am sure you mean well, but are you quite certain that you know how to execute such a trust as this? i am an old man, like you, and i am actuated by an old man's concern in all that is young and promising. do you not think that what i have seen of you and this little creature to-night must have an interest not wholly free from pain?'

'sir,' rejoined the old man after a moment's silence. 'i have no right to feel hurt at what you say. it is true that in many respects i am the child, and she the grown person--that you have seen already. but waking or sleeping, by night or day, in sickness or health, she is the one object of my care, and if you knew of how much care, you would look on me with different eyes, you would indeed. ah! it's a weary life for an old man--a weary, weary life--but there is a great end to gain and that i keep before me.'

seeing that he was in a state of excitement and impatience, i turned to put on an outer coat which i had thrown off on entering the room, purposing to say no more. i was surprised to see the child standing patiently by with a cloak upon her arm, and in her hand a hat, and stick.

'those are not mine, my dear,' said i.

'no,' returned the child, 'they are grandfather's.'

'but he is not going out to-night.'

'oh, yes, he is,' said the child, with a smile.

'and what becomes of you, my pretty one?'

'me! i stay here of course. i always do.'

i looked in astonishment towards the old man, but he was, or feigned to be, busied in the arrangement of his dress. from him i looked back to the slight gentle figure of the child. alone! in that gloomy place all the long, dreary night.

she evinced no consciousness of my surprise, but cheerfully helped the old man with his cloak, and when he was ready took a candle to light us out. finding that we did not follow as she expected, she looked back with a smile and waited for us. the old man showed by his face that he plainly understood the cause of my hesitation, but he merely signed to me with an inclination of the head to pass out of the room before him, and remained silent. i had no resource but to comply.

when we reached the door, the child setting down the candle, turned to say good night and raised her face to kiss me. then she ran to the old man, who folded her in his arms and bade god bless her.

'sleep soundly, nell,' he said in a low voice, 'and angels guard thy bed! do not forget thy prayers, my sweet.'

'no, indeed,' answered the child fervently, 'they make me feel so happy!'

'that's well; i know they do; they should,' said the old man. 'bless thee a hundred times! early in the morning i shall be home.'

'you'll not ring twice,' returned the child. 'the bell wakes me, even in the middle of a dream.'

with this, they separated. the child opened the door (now guarded by a shutter which i had heard the boy put up before he left the house) and with another farewell whose clear and tender note i have recalled a thousand times, held it until we had passed out. the old man paused a moment while it was gently closed and fastened on the inside, and satisfied that this was done, walked on at a slow pace. at the street-corner he stopped, and regarding me with a troubled countenance said that our ways were widely different and that he must take his leave. i would have spoken, but summoning up more alacrity than might have been expected in one of his appearance, he hurried away. i could see that twice or thrice he looked back as if to ascertain if i were still watching him, or perhaps to assure himself that i was not following at a distance. the obscurity of the night favoured his disappearance, and his figure was soon beyond my sight.

i remained standing on the spot where he had left me, unwilling to depart, and yet unknowing why i should loiter there. i looked wistfully into the street and had lately quitted, and after a time directed my steps that way. i passed and repassed the house, and stopped and listened at the door; all was dark, and silent as the grave.

yet i lingered about, and could not tear myself away, thinking of all possible harm that might happen to the child--of fires and robberies and even murder--and feeling as if some evil must ensue if i turned my back upon the place. the closing of a door or window in the street brought me before the curiosity-dealer's once more; i crossed the road and looked up at the house to assure myself that the noise had not come from there. no, it was black, cold, and lifeless as before.

there were few passengers astir; the street was sad and dismal, and pretty well my own. a few stragglers from the theatres hurried by, and now and then i turned aside to avoid some noisy drunkard as he reeled homewards, but these interruptions were not frequent and soon ceased. the clocks struck one. still i paced up and down, promising myself that every time should be the last, and breaking faith with myself on some new plea as often as i did so.

the more i thought of what the old man had said, and of his looks and bearing, the less i could account for what i had seen and heard. i had a strong misgiving that his nightly absence was for no good purpose. i had only know the fact through the innocence of the child, and though the old man was by at the time, and saw my undisguised surprise, he had preserved a strange mystery upon the subject and offered no word of explanation. these reflections naturally recalled again more strongly than before his haggard face, his wandering manner, his restless anxious looks. his affection for the child might not be inconsistent with villany of the worst kind; even that very affection was in itself an extraordinary contradiction, or how could he leave her thus? disposed as i was to think badly of him, i never doubted that his love for her was real. i could not admit the thought, remembering what had passed between us, and the tone of voice in which he had called her by her name.

'stay here of course,' the child had said in answer to my question, 'i always do!' what could take him from home by night, and every night! i called up all the strange tales i had ever heard of dark and secret deeds committed in great towns and escaping detection for a long series of years; wild as many of these stories were, i could not find one adapted to this mystery, which only became the more impenetrable, in proportion as i sought to solve it.

occupied with such thoughts as these, and a crowd of others all tending to the same point, i continued to pace the street for two long hours; at length the rain began to descend heavily, and then over-powered by fatigue though no less interested than i had been at first, i engaged the nearest coach and so got home. a cheerful fire was blazing on the hearth, the lamp burnt brightly, my clock received me with its old familiar welcome; everything was quiet, warm and cheering, and in happy contrast to the gloom and darkness i had quitted.

but all that night, waking or in my sleep, the same thoughts recurred and the same images retained possession of my brain. i had ever before me the old dark murky rooms--the gaunt suits of mail with their ghostly silent air--the faces all awry, grinning from wood and stone--the dust and rust and worm that lives in wood--and alone in the midst of all this lumber and decay and ugly age, the beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams.

chapter 2

after combating, for nearly a week, the feeling which impelled me to revisit the place i had quitted under the circumstances already detailed, i yielded to it at length; and determining that this time i would present myself by the light of day, bent my steps thither early in the morning.

i walked past the house, and took several turns in the street, with that kind of hesitation which is natural to a man who is conscious that the visit he is about to pay is unexpected, and may not be very acceptable. however, as the door of the shop was shut, and it did not appear likely that i should be recognized by those within, if i continued merely to pass up and down before it, i soon conquered this irresolution, and found myself in the curiosity dealer's warehouse.

the old man and another person were together in the back part, and there seemed to have been high words between them, for their voices which were raised to a very high pitch suddenly stopped on my entering, and the old man advancing hastily towards me, said in a tremulous tone that he was very glad i had come.

'you interrupted us at a critical moment,' said he, pointing to the man whom i had found in company with him; 'this fellow will murder me one of these days. he would have done so, long ago, if he had dared.'

'bah! you would swear away my life if you could,' returned the other, after bestowing a stare and a frown on me; 'we all know that!'

'i almost think i could,' cried the old man, turning feebly upon him. 'if oaths, or prayers, or words, could rid me of you, they should. i would be quit of you, and would be relieved if you were dead.'

'i know it,' returned the other. 'i said so, didn't i? but neither oaths, or prayers, nor words, will kill me, and therefore i live, and mean to live.'

'and his mother died!' cried the old man, passionately clasping his hands and looking upward; 'and this is heaven's justice!'

the other stood lunging with his foot upon a chair, and regarded him with a contemptuous sneer. he was a young man of one-and-twenty or thereabouts; well made, and certainly handsome, though the expression of his face was far from prepossessing, having in common with his manner and even his dress, a dissipated, insolent air which repelled one.

'justice or no justice,' said the young fellow, 'here i am and here i shall stop till such time as i think fit to go, unless you send for assistance to put me out--which you won't do, i know. i tell you again that i want to see my sister.'

'your sister!' said the old man bitterly.

'ah! you can't change the relationship,' returned the other. 'if you could, you'd have done it long ago. i want to see my sister, that you keep cooped up here, poisoning her mind with your sly secrets and pretending an affection for her that you may work her to death, and add a few scraped shillings every week to the money you can hardly count. i want to see her; and i will.'

'here's a moralist to talk of poisoned minds! here's a generous spirit to scorn scraped-up shillings!' cried the old man, turning from him to me. 'a profligate, sir, who has forfeited every claim not only upon those who have the misfortune to be of his blood, but upon society which knows nothing of him but his misdeeds. a liar

too,' he added, in a lower voice as he drew closer to me, 'who knows how dear she is to me, and seeks to wound me even there, because there is a stranger nearby.'

'strangers are nothing to me, grandfather,' said the young fellow catching at the word, 'nor i to them, i hope. the best they can do, is to keep an eye to their business and leave me to mind. there's a friend of mine waiting outside, and as it seems that i may have to wait some time, i'll call him in, with your leave.'

saying this, he stepped to the door, and looking down the street beckoned several times to some unseen person, who, to judge from the air of impatience with which these signals were accompanied, required a great quantity of persuasion to induce him to advance. at length there sauntered up, on the opposite side of the way--with a bad pretense of passing by accident--a figure conspicuous for its dirty smartness, which after a great many frowns and jerks of the head, in resistance of the invitation, ultimately crossed the road and was brought into the shop.

'there. it's dick swiveller,' said the young fellow, pushing him in. 'sit down, swiveller.'

'but is the old min agreeable?' said mr swiveller in an undertone.

mr swiveller complied, and looking about him with a proprietary smile, observed that last week was a fine week for the ducks, and this week was a fine week for the dust; he also observed that whilst standing by the post at the street-corner, he had observed a pig with a straw in his mouth issuing out of the tobacco-shop, from which appearance he augured that another fine week for the ducks was approaching, and that rain would certainly ensue. he furthermore took occasion to apologize for any negligence that might be perceptible in his dress, on the ground that last night he had 'the sun very strong in his eyes'; by which expression he was understood to convey to his hearers in the most delicate manner possible, the information that he had been extremely drunk.

'but what,' said mr swiveller with a sigh, 'what is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conviviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather! what is the odds so long as the spirit is expanded by means of rosy wine, and the present moment is the least happiest of our existence!'

'you needn't act the chairman here,' said his friend, half aside.

'fred!' cried mr swiveller, tapping his nose, 'a word to the wise is sufficient for them--we may be good and happy without riches, fred. say not another syllable. i know my cue; smart is the word. only one little whisper, fred--is the old min friendly?'

'never you mind,' replied his friend.

'right again, quite right,' said mr swiveller, 'caution is the word, and caution is the act.' with that, he winked as if in preservation of some deep secret, and folding his arms and leaning back in his chair, looked up at the ceiling with profound gravity.

it was perhaps not very unreasonable to suspect from what had already passed, that mr swiveller was not quite recovered from the effects of the powerful sunlight to which he had made allusion; but if no such suspicion had been awakened by his speech, his wiry hair, dull eyes, and fallow face would still have been strong witnesses against him. his attire was not, as he had himself hinted, remarkable for the nicest arrangement, but was in a state of disorder which strongly induced the idea that he had gone to bed in it. it consisted of a brown body-coat with a great many brass buttons up the front and only one behind, a bright check neckerchief, a plaid waistcoat, soiled white trousers, and a very limp hat, worn with the wrong side foremost, to hide a hole in the brim. the breast of his coat was ornamented with an outside pocket from which there peeped forth the cleanest end of a very large and very ill-favoured handkerchief; his dirty wristbands were pulled on as far as possible and ostentatiously folded back over his cuffs; he displayed no gloves, and carried a yellow cane having at the top a bone hand with the semblance of a ring on its little finger and a black ball in its grasp. with all these personal advantages (to which may be added a strong savour of tobacco-smoke, and a prevailing greasiness of appearance) mr swiveller leant back in his chair with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and occasionally pitching his voice to the needful key, obliged the company with a few bars of an intensely dismal air, and then, in the middle of a note, relapsed into his former silence.

the old man sat himself down in a chair, and with folded hands, looked sometimes at his grandson and sometimes at his strange companion, as if he were utterly powerless and had no resource but to leave them to do as they pleased. the young man reclined against a table at no great distance from his friend, in apparent indifference to everything that had passed; and i--who felt the difficulty of any interference, notwithstanding that the old man had appealed to me, both by words and looks--made the best feint i could of being occupied in examining some of the goods that were disposed for sale, and paying very little attention to a person before me.

the silence was not of long duration, for mr swiveller, after favouring us with several melodious assurances that his heart was in the highlands, and that he wanted but his arab steed as a preliminary to the achievement of great feats of valour and loyalty, removed his eyes from the ceiling and subsided into prose again.

'fred,' said mr swiveller stopping short, as if the idea had suddenly occurred to him, and speaking in the same audible whisper as before, 'is the old min friendly?'

'what does it matter?' returned his friend peevishly.

'no, but is he?' said dick.

'yes, of course. what do i care whether he is or not?'

emboldened as it seemed by this reply to enter into a more general conversation, mr swiveller plainly laid himself out to captivate our attention. he began by remarking that soda-water, though a good thing in the abstract, was apt to lie cold upon the stomach unless qualified with ginger, or a small infusion of brandy, which latter article he held to be preferable in all cases, saving for the one consideration of expense. nobody venturing to dispute these positions, he proceeded to observe that the human hair was a great retainer of tobacco-smoke, and that the young gentlemen of westminster and eton, after eating vast quantities of apples to conceal any scent of cigars from their anxious friends, were usually detected in consequence of their heads possessing this remarkable property; when he concluded that if the royal society would turn their attention to the circumstance, and endeavour to find in the resources of science a means of preventing such untoward revelations, they might indeed be looked upon as benefactors to mankind. these opinions being equally incontrovertible with those he had already pronounced, he went on to inform us that jamaica rum, though unquestionably an agreeable spirit of great richness and flavour, had the drawback of remaining constantly present to the taste next day; and nobody being venturesome enough to argue this point either, he increased in confidence and became yet more companionable and communicative.

'it's a devil of a thing, gentlemen,' said mr swiveller, 'when relations fall out and disagree. if the wing of friendship should never moult a feather, the wing of relationship should never be clipped, but be always expanded and serene. why should a grandson and grandfather peg away at each other with mutual violence when all might be bliss and concord. why not jine hands and forgit it?'

'hold your tongue,' said his friend.

'sir,' replied mr swiveller, 'don't you interrupt the chair. gentlemen, how does the case stand, upon the present occasion? here is a jolly old grandfather--i say it with the utmost respect--and here is a wild, young grandson. the jolly old grandfather says to the wild young grandson, 'i have brought you up and educated you, fred; i have put you in the way of getting on in life; you have bolted a little out of course, as young fellows often do; and you shall never have another chance, nor the ghost of half a one.' the wild young grandson makes answer to this and says, 'you're as rich as rich can be; you have been at no uncommon expense on my account, you're saving up piles of money for my little sister that lives with you in a secret, stealthy, hugger-muggering kind of way and with no manner of enjoyment--why can't you stand a trifle for your grown-up relation?' the jolly old grandfather unto this, retorts, not only that he declines to fork out with that cheerful readiness which is always so agreeable and pleasant in a gentleman of his time of life, but that he will bow up, and call names, and make reflections whenever they meet. then the plain question is, an't it a pity that this state of things should continue, and how much better would it be for the gentleman to hand over a reasonable amount of tin, and make it all right and comfortable?'

having delivered this oration with a great many waves and flourishes of the hand, mr swiveller abruptly thrust the head of his cane into his mouth as if to prevent himself from impairing the effect of his speech by adding one other word.

'why do you hunt and persecute me, god help me!' said the old man turning to his grandson. 'why do you bring your profligate companions here? how often am i to tell you that my life is one of care and self-denial, and that i am poor?'

'how often am i to tell you,' returned the other, looking coldly at him, 'that i know better?'

'you have chosen your own path,' said the old man. 'follow it. leave nell and me to toil and work.'

'nell will be a woman soon,' returned the other, 'and, bred in your faith, she'll forget her brother unless he shows himself sometimes.'

'take care,' said the old man with sparkling eyes, 'that she does not forget you when you would have her memory keenest. take care that the day don't come when you walk barefoot in the streets, and she rides by in a gay carriage of her own.'

'you mean when she has your money?' retorted the other. 'how like a poor man he talks!'

'and yet,' said the old man dropping his voice and speaking like one who thinks aloud, 'how poor we are, and what a life it is! the cause is a young child's guiltless of all harm or wrong, but nothing goes well with it! hope and patience, hope and patience!'

these words were uttered in too low a tone to reach the ears of the young men. mr swiveller appeared to think the they implied some mental struggle consequent upon the powerful effect of his address, for he poked his friend with his cane and whispered his conviction that he had administered 'a clincher,' and that he expected a commission on the profits. discovering his mistake after a while, he appeared to grow rather sleepily and discontented, and had more than once suggested the propriety of an immediate departure, when the door opened, and the child herself appeared.

chapter 3

the child was closely followed by an elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant. his black eyes were restless, sly, and cunning; his mouth and chin, bristly with the stubble of a coarse hard beard; and his complexion was one of that kind which never looks clean or wholesome. but what added most to the grotesque expression of his face was a ghastly smile, which, appearing to be the mere result of habit and to have no connection with any mirthful or complacent

feeling, constantly revealed the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog. his dress consisted of a large high-crowned hat, a worn dark suit, a pair of capacious shoes, and a dirty white neckerchief sufficiently limp and crumpled to disclose the greater portion of his wiry throat. such hair as he had was of a grizzled black, cut short and straight upon his temples, and hanging in a frowzy fringe about his ears. his hands, which were of a rough, coarse grain, were very dirty; his fingernails were crooked, long, and yellow.

there was ample time to note these particulars, for besides that they were sufficiently obvious without very close observation, some moments elapsed before any one broke silence. the child advanced timidly towards her brother and put her hand in his, the dwarf (if we may call him so) glanced keenly at all present, and the curiosity-dealer, who plainly had not expected his uncouth visitor, seemed disconcerted and embarrassed.

'ah!' said the dwarf, who with his hand stretched out above his eyes had been surveying the young man attentively, 'that should be your grandson, neighbour!'

'say rather that he should not be,' replied the old man. 'but he is.'

'and that?' said the dwarf, pointing to dick swiveller.

'some friend of his, as welcome here as he,' said the old man.

'and that?' inquired the dwarf, wheeling round and pointing straight at me.

'a gentleman who was so good as to bring nell home the other night when she lost her way, coming from your house.'

the little man turned to the child as if to chide her or express his wonder, but as she was talking to the young man, held his peace, and bent his head to listen.

'well, nelly,' said the young fellow aloud. 'do they teach you to hate me, eh?'

'no, no. for shame. oh, no!' cried the child.

'to love me, perhaps?' pursued her brother with a sneer.

'to do neither,' she returned. 'they never speak to me about you. indeed they never do.'

'i dare be bound for that,' he said, darting a bitter look at the grandfather. 'i dare be bound for that nell. oh! i believe you there!'

'but i love you dearly, fred,' said the child.

'no doubt!'

'i do indeed, and always will,' the child repeated with great emotion, 'but oh! if you would leave off vexing him and making him unhappy, then i could love you more.'

'i see!' said the young man, as he stooped carelessly over the child, and having kissed her, pushed her from him: 'there--get you away now you have said your lesson. you needn't whimper. we part good friends enough, if that's the matter.'

he remained silent, following her with his eyes, until she had gained her little room and closed the door; and then turning to the dwarf, said abruptly,

'harkee, mr--'

'meaning me?' returned the dwarf. 'quilt is my name. you might remember. it's not a long one--daniel quilt.'

'harkee, mr quilt, then,' pursued the other, 'you have some influence with my grandfather there.'

'some,' said mr quilt emphatically.

'and are in a few of his mysteries and secrets.'

'a few,' replied quilt, with equal dryness.

'then let me tell him once for all, through you, that i will come into and go out of this place as often as i like, so long as he keeps nell here; and that if he wants to be quit of me, he must first be quit of her. what have i done to be made a bugbear of, and to be shunned and dreaded as if i brought the plague? he'll tell you that i have no natural affection; and that i care no more for nell, for her own sake, than i do for him. let him say so. i care for the whim, then, of coming to and fro and reminding her of my existence. i will see her when i please. that's my point. i came here to-day to maintain it, and i'll come here again fifty times with the same object and always with the same success. i said i would stop till i had gained it. i have done so, and now my visit's ended. come dick.'

'stop!' cried mr swiveller, as his companion turned toward the door. 'sir!'

'sir, i am your humble servant,' said mr quilt, to whom the monosyllable was addressed.

'before i leave the gay and festive scene, and halls of dazzling light, sir,' said mr swiveller, 'i will with your permission, attempt a slight remark. i came here, sir, this day, under the impression that the old min was friendly.'

'proceed, sir,' said daniel quilt; for the orator had made a sudden stop.

'inspired by this idea and the sentiments it awakened, sir, and feeling as a mutual friend that badgering, baiting, and bullying, was not the sort of thing calculated to expand the souls and promote the social harmony of the contending parties, i took upon myself to suggest a course which is the course to be adopted to the present occasion. will you allow me to whisper half a syllable, sir?'

without waiting for the permission he sought, mr swiveller stepped up to the dwarf, and leaning on his shoulder and stooping down to get at his ear, said in a voice which was perfectly audible to all present,

'the watch-word to the old min is--fork.'

'is what?' demanded quilt.

'is fork, sir, fork,' replied mr swiveller slapping his picket. 'you are awake, sir?'

the dwarf nodded. mr swiveller drew back and nodded likewise, then drew a little further back and nodded again, and so on. by these means he in time reached the door, where he gave a great cough to attract the dwarf's attention and gain an opportunity of expressing in dumb show, the closest confidence and most inviolable secrecy. having performed the serious pantomime that was necessary for the due conveyance of these idea, he cast himself upon his friend's track, and vanished.

'humph!' said the dwarf with a sour look and a shrug of his shoulders, 'so much for dear relations. thank god i acknowledge none! nor need you either,' he added, turning to the old man, 'if you were not as weak as a reed, and nearly as senseless.'

'what would you have me do?' he retorted in a kind of helpless desperation. 'it is easy to talk and sneer. what would you have me do?'

'what would i do if i was in your case?' said the dwarf.

'something violent, no doubt.'

'you're right there,' returned the little man, highly gratified by the compliment, for such he evidently considered it; and grinning like a devil as he rubbed his dirty hands together. 'ask mrs quilt, pretty mrs quilt, obedient, timid, loving mrs quilt. but that reminds me--i have left her all alone, and she will be anxious and know not a moment's peace till i return. i know she's always in that condition when i'm away, thought she doesn't dare to say so, unless i lead her on and tell her she may speak freely and i won't be angry with her. oh! well-trained mrs quilt.'

the creature appeared quite horrible with his monstrous head and little body, as he rubbed his hands slowly round, and round, and round again--with something fantastic even in his manner of performing this slight action--and, dropping his shaggy brows and cocking his chin in the air, glanced upward with a stealthy look of exultation that an imp might have copied and appropriated to himself.

'here,' he said, putting his hand into his breast and sidling up to the old man as he spoke; 'i brought it myself for fear of accidents, as, being in gold, it was something large and heavy for nell to carry in her bag. she need be accustomed to such loads betimes thought, neighbor, for she will carry weight when you are dead.'

'heaven send she may! i hope so,' said the old man with something like a groan.'

'hope so!' echoed the dwarf, approaching close to his ear; 'neighbour, i would i knew in what good investment all these supplies are sunk. but you are a deep man, and keep your secret close.'

'my secret!' said the other with a haggard look. 'yes, you're right--i--i--keep it close--very close.'

he said no more, but taking the money turned away with a slow, uncertain step, and pressed his hand upon his head like a weary and dejected man. the dwarf watched him sharply, while he passed into the little sitting-room and locked it in an iron safe above the chimney-piece; and after musing for a short space, prepared to take his leave, observing that unless he made good haste, mrs quilt would certainly be in fits on his return.

'and so, neighbour,' he added, 'i'll turn my face homewards, leaving my love for nelly and hoping she may never lose her way again, though her doing so has procured me an honour i didn't expect.' with that he bowed and leered at me, and with a keen glance around which seemed to comprehend every object within his range of vision, however, small or trivial, went his way.

i had several times essayed to go myself, but the old man had always opposed it and entreated me to remain. as he renewed his entreaties on our being left alone, and adverted with many thanks to the former occasion of our being together, i willingly yielded to his persuasions, and sat down, pretending to examine some curious miniatures and a few old medals which he placed before me. it needed no great pressing to induce me to stay, for if my curiosity has been excited on the occasion of my first visit, it certainly was not diminished now.

nell joined us before long, and bringing some needle-work to the table, sat by the old man's side. it was pleasant to observe the fresh flowers in the room, the pet bird with a green bough shading his little cage, the breath of freshness and youth which seemed to rustle through the old dull house and hover round the child. it was curious, but not so pleasant, to turn from the beauty and grace of the girl, to the stooping figure, care-worn face, and jaded aspect of the old man. as he grew weaker and more feeble, what would become of this lonely little creature; poor protector as he was, say that he died--what we be her fate, then?

the old man almost answered my thoughts, as he laid his hand on hers, and spoke aloud.

'i'll be of better cheer, nell,' he said; 'there must be good fortune in store for thee--i do not ask it for myself, but thee. such miseries must fall on thy innocent head without it, that i cannot believe but that, being tempted, it will come at last!'

she looked cheerfully into his face, but made no answer.

'when i think,' said he, 'of the many years--many in thy short life--that thou has lived with me; of my monotonous existence, knowing no companions of thy own age nor any childish pleasures; of the solitude in which thou has grown to be what thou art, and in which thou hast lived apart from nearly all thy kind but one old man; i sometimes fear i have dealt hardly by thee, nell.'

'grandfather!' cried the child in unfeigned surprise.

'not in intention--no no,' said he. 'i have ever looked forward to the time that should enable thee to mix among the gayest and prettiest, and take thy station with the best. but i still look forward, nell, i still look forward, and if i should be forced to leave thee, meanwhile, how have i fitted thee for struggles with the

world? the poor bird yonder is as well qualified to encounter it, and be turned adrift upon its mercies--hark! i hear kit outside. go to him, nell, go to him.'

she rose, and hurrying away, stopped, turned back, and put her arms about the old man's neck, then left him and hurried away again--but faster this time, to hide her falling tears.

'a word in your ear, sir,' said the old man in a hurried whisper. 'i have been rendered uneasy by what you said the other night, and can only plead that i have done all for the best--that it is too late to retract, if i could (though i cannot)--and that i hope to triumph yet. all is for her sake. i have borne great poverty myself, and would spare her the sufferings that poverty carries with it. i would spare her the miseries that brought her mother, my own dear child, to an early grave. i would leave her--not with resources which could be easily spent or squandered away, but with what would place her beyond the reach of want for ever. you mark me sir? she shall have no pittance, but a fortune--hush! i can say no more than that, now or at any other time, and she is here again!'

the eagerness with which all this was poured into my ear, the trembling of the hand with which he clasped my arm, the strained and starting eyes he fixed upon me, the wild vehemence and agitation of his manner, filled me with amazement. all that i had heard and seen, and a great part of what he had said himself, led me to suppose that he was a wealthy man. i could form no comprehension of his character, unless he were one of those miserable wretches who, having made gain the sole end and object of their lives and succeeded in amassing great riches, are constantly tortured by the dread of poverty, and best by fears of loss and ruin. many things he had said which i had been at a loss to understand, were quite reconcilable with the idea thus presented to me, and at length i concluded that beyond all doubt he was one of this unhappy race.

the opinion was not the result of hasty consideration, for indeed there was no opportunity at that time, as the child came directly, and soon occupied herself in preparations for giving kit a writing lesson, of which it seemed he had a couple every week, and one regularly on that evening, to the great mirth and enjoyment both of himself and his instructress. to relate how it was a long time before his modesty could be so far prevailed upon as it admit of his sitting down in the parlour, in the presence of an unknown gentleman--how, when he did set down, he tucked up his sleeves and squared his elbows and put his face close to the copy-book and squinted horribly at the lines--how, from the very first moment of having the pen in his hand, he began to wallow in blots, and to daub himself with ink up to the very roots of his hair--how, if he did by accident form a letter properly, he immediately smeared it out again with his arm in his preparations to make another -- how, at every fresh mistake, there was a fresh burst of merriment from the child and louder and not less hearty laugh from poor kit himself--and how there was all the way through, notwithstanding, a gentle wish on her part to teach, and an anxious desire on his to learn--to relate all these particulars would no doubt occupy more space and time than they deserve. it will be sufficient to say that the lesson was given--that evening passed and night came on--that the old man again grew restless and impatient--that he quitted the house secretly at the same hour as before--and that the child was once more left alone within its gloomy walls.

and now that i have carried this history so far in my own character and introduced these personages to the reader, i shall for the convenience of the narrative detach myself from its further course, and leave those who have prominent and necessary parts in it to speak and act for themselves.

chapter 4

mr and mrs quilp resided on tower hill; and in her bower on tower hill. mrs quilp was left to pine the absence of her lord, when he quitted her on the business which he had already seen to transact.

mr quilp could scarcely be said to be of any particular trade or calling, though his pursuits were diversified and his occupations numerous. he collected the rents of whole colonies of filthy streets and alleys by the waterside, advanced money to the seamen and petty officers of merchant vessels, had a share in the ventures of divers mates of east indiamen, smoked his smuggled cigars under the very nose of the custom house, and made appointments on 'change with men in glazed hats and round jackets pretty well every day. on the surry side of the river was a small rat-infested dreary yard called 'quilp's wharf,' in which were a little wooden counting-house burrowing all awry in the dust as if it had fallen from the clouds and ploughed into the ground; a few fragments of rusty anchors; several large iron rings; some piles of rotten wood; and two or three heaps of old sheet copper, crumpled, cracked, and battered. on quilp's wharf, daniel quilp was a ship-breaker, yet to judge from these appearances he must either have been a ship-breaker on a very small scale, or have broken his ships up very small indeed. neither did the place present any extraordinary aspect of life or activity, as its only human occupant was an amphibious boy in a canvas suit, whose sole change of occupation was from sitting on the head of a pile and throwing stones into the mud when the tide was out, to standing with his hands in his pockets gazing listlessly on the motion and on the bustle of the river at high-water.

the dwarf's lodging on tower hill comprised, besides the needful accommodation for himself and mrs quilp, a small sleeping-closet for that lady's mother, who resided with the couple and waged perpetual war with daniel; of whom, notwithstanding, she stood in no slight dread. indeed, the ugly creature contrived by some means or other--whether by his ugliness or his ferocity or his natural anger, most of those with whom he was brought into daily contact and communication. over nobody had he such complete ascendancy as mrs quilp herself--a pretty little, mild-spoken, blue-eyed woman, who having allied herself in wedlock to the dwarf in one of those strange infatuations of which examples are by no means scarce, performed a sound practical penance for her folly, every day of her life.

it has been said that mrs quilp was pining in her bower. in her bower she was, but not alone, for besides the old lady her mother of whom mention has recently been made, there were present some half-dozen ladies of the neighborhood who had happened by a strange accident (and also by a little understanding among themselves) to drop in one after another, just about tea-time. this being a season favourable to conversation, and the room being a cool, shady, lazy kind of place, with some plants at the open window shutting out the dust, and interposing pleasantly enough tea table within and the old tower without, it is no wonder that the ladies felt an inclination to talk and linger, especially when there are taken into account the additional inducements of fresh butter, new bread, shrimps, and watercresses.

now, the ladies being together under these circumstances, it was extremely natural that the discourse should turn upon the propensity of mankind to tyrannize over the weaker sex, and the duty that developed upon the weaker sex to resist that tyranny and assert their rights and dignity. it was natural for four reasons: firstly, because mrs quilp being a young woman and notoriously under the dominion of her husband ought to be excited to rebel; secondly, because mrs quilp's parent was known to be laudably shrewish in her disposition and inclined to resist male authority; thirdly, because each visitor wished to show for herself how superior she was in this respect to the generality of her sex; and fourthly, because the company being accustomed to acandalise each other in pairs, were deprived of their usual subject of conversation now that they were all assembled in close friendship, and had consequently no better employment than to attack the common enemy.

moved by these considerations, a stout lady opened the proceedings by inquiring, with an air of great concern and sympathy, how mr quilp was; whereunto mr quilp's wife's mother replied sharply, 'oh! he was well enough--nothing much was every the matter with him--and ill weeds were sure to thrive.' all the ladies then sighed in concert, shook their heads gravely, and looked at mrs quilp as a martyr.

'ah!' said the spokeswoman, 'i wish you'd give her a little of your advice, mrs jiniwin'--mrs quilp had been a miss jiniwin it should be observed--'nobody knows better than you, ma'am, what us women owe to ourselves.'

'owe indeed, ma'am!' replied mrs jiniwin. 'when my poor husband, her dear father, was alive, if he had ever venture'd a cross word to me, i'd have--' the good old lady did not finish the sentence, but she twisted off the head of a shrimp with a vindictiveness which seemed to imply that the action was in some degree a substitute for words. in this light it was clearly understood by the other party, who immediately replied with great approbation, 'you quite enter into my feelings, ma'am, and it's jist what i'd do myself.'

'but you have no call to do it,' said mrs jiniwin. 'luckily for you, you have no more occasion to do it than i had.'

'no woman need have, if she was true to herself,' rejoined the stout lady.

'do you hear that, betsy?' said mrs jiniwin, in a warning voice. 'how often have i said the same words to you, and almost gone down my knees when i spoke 'em!'

poor mrs quilp, who had looked in a state of helplessness from one face of condolence to another, coloured, smiled, and shook her head doubtfully. this was the signal for a general clamour, which beginning in a low murmur gradually swelled into a great noise in which everybody spoke at once, and all said that she being a young woman had no right to set up her opinions against the experiences of those who knew so much better; that it was very wrong of her not to take the advice of people who had nothing at heart but her good; that it was next door to being downright ungrateful to conduct herself in that manner; that if she had no respect for herself she ought to have some for other women, all of whom she compromised by her meekness; and that if she had no respect for other women, the time would come when other women would have no respect for her; and she would be very sorry for that, they could tell her. having dealt out these admonitions, the ladies fell to a more powerful assault than they had yet made upon the mixed tea, new bread, fresh butter, shrimps, and watercresses, and said that their vexation was so great to see her going on like that, that they could hardly bring themselves to eat a single morsel.

it's all very fine to talk,' said mrs quilp with much simplicity, 'but i know that if i was to die to-morrow, quilp could marry anybody he pleased--now that he could, i know!'

there was quite a scream of indignation at this idea. marry whom he pleased! they would like to see him dare to think of marrying any of them; they would like to see the faintest approach to such a thing. one lady (a widow) was quite certain she should stab him if he hinted at it.

'very well,' said mrs quilp, nodding her head, 'as i said just now, it's very easy to talk, but i say again that i know--that i'm sure--quilp has such a way with him when he likes, that the best looking

woman here couldn't refuse him if i was dead, and she was free, and he chose to make love to him. come!

everybody bridled up at this remark, as much as to say, 'i know you mean me. let him try--that's all.' and yet for some hidden reason they were all angry with the widow, and each lady whispered in her neighbour's ear that it was very plain that said widow thought herself the person referred to, and what a puss she was!

'mother knows,' said mrs quilp, 'that what i say is quite correct, for she often said so before we were married. didn't you say so, mother?'

this inquiry involved the respected lady in rather a delicate position, for she certainly had been an active party in making her daughter mrs quilp, and, besides, it was not supporting the family credit to encourage the idea that she had married a man whom nobody else would have. on the other hand, to exaggerate the captivating qualities of her son-in-law would be to weaken the cause of which all her energies were deeply engaged. beset by these opposing considerations, mrs jiniwin admitted the powers of insinuation, but denied the right to govern, and with a timely compliment to the stout lady brought back the discussion to the point from which it had strayed.

'oh! it's a sensible and proper thing indeed, what mrs george has said!' exclaimed the old lady. 'if women are only true to themselves!--but betsy isn't, and more's the shame and pity.'

'before i'd let a man order me about as quilp orders her,' said mrs george, 'before i'd consent to stand in awe of a man as she does of him, i'd--i'd kill myself, and write a letter first to say he did it!'

this remark being loudly commended and approved of, another lady (from the minorities) put in her word:

'mr quilp may be a very nice man,' said this lady, 'and i supposed there's no doubt he is, because mrs quilp says he is, and mrs jiniwin says he is, and they ought to know, or nobody does. but still he is not quite a--what one calls a handsome man, nor quite a young man neither, which might be a little excuse for him if anything could be; whereas his wife is young, and is good-looking, and is a woman--which is the greatest thing after all.'

this last clause being delivered with extraordinary pathos, elicited a corresponding murmur from the hearers, stimulated by which the lady went on to remark that if such a husband was cross and unreasonable with such a wife, then--

'if he is!' interposed the mother, putting down her tea-cup and brushing the crumbs out of her lap, preparatory to making a solemn declaration. 'if he is! he is the greatest tyrant that every lived, she daren't call her soul her own, he makes her tremble with a word and even with a look, he frightens her to death, and she hasn't the spirit to give him a word back, no, not a single word.'

notwithstanding that the fact had been notorious beforehand to all the tea-drinkers, and had been discussed and expatiated on at every tea-drinking in the neighbourhood for the last twelve months, this official communication was no sooner made than they all began to talk at once and to vie with each other in vehemence and volubility. mrs george remarked that people would talk, that people had often said this to her before, that mrs simmons then and there present had told her so twenty times, that she had always said, 'no, henrietta simmons, unless i see it with my own eyes and hear it with my own ears, i never will believe it.' mrs simmons corroborated this testimony and added strong evidence of her own. the lady from the minorities recounted a successful course of treatment under which she had placed her own husband, who, from manifesting one month after marriage unequivocal symptoms of the tiger, had by this means become subdued into a perfect lamb. another lady recounted her own personal struggle and final triumph, in the course whereof she had found it necessary to call in her mother and two aunts, and to weep incessantly night and day for six weeks. a third, who in the general confusion could secure no other listener, fastened herself upon a young woman still unmarried who happened to be amongst them, and conjured her, as she valued her own peace of mind and happiness to profit by this solemn occasion, to take example from the weakness of mrs quilp, and from that time forth to direct her whole thoughts to taming and subduing the rebellious spirit of man.

the noise was at its height, and half the company had elevated their voices into a perfect shriek in order to drown the voices of the other half, when mrs jiniwin was seen to change colour and shake her forefinger stealthily, as if exhorting them to silence. then, and not until then, daniel quilp himself, the cause and occasion of all this clamour, was observed to be in the room, looking on and listening with profound attention.

'go on, ladies, go on,' said daniel. 'mrs quilp, pray ask the ladies to stop to supper, and have a couple of lobsters and something light and palatable.'

'i--i--didn't ask them to tea, quilp,' stammered his wife. it's quite an accident.'

'so much the better, mrs quilp; these accidental parties are always the pleasantest,' said the dwarf, rubbing his hands so hard that he seemed to be engaged in manufacturing, of the dirt with which they were encrusted, little charges for popguns. 'what! not going, ladies, you are not going, surely!'

his fair enemies tossed their heads slightly as they sought their respective bonnets and shawls, but left all verbal contention to mrs jiniwin, who finding herself in the position of champion, made a faint struggle to sustain the character.

'and why not stop to supper, quilp,' said the old lady, 'if my daughter had a mind?'

'to be sure,' rejoined daniel. 'why not?'

'there's nothing dishonest or wrong in a supper, i hope?' said mrs jiniwin.

'surely not,' returned the dwarf. 'why should there be? nor anything unwholesome, either, unless there's lobster-salad or prawns, which i'm told are not good for digestion.'

'and you wouldn't like your wife to be attacked with that, or anything else that would make her uneasy would you?' said mrs jiniwin.

'not for a score of worlds,' replied the dwarf with a grin. 'not even to have a score of mothers-in-law at the same time--and what a blessing that would be!'

'my daughter's your wife, mr quilp, certainly,' said the old lady with a giggle, meant for satirical and to imply that he needed to be reminded of the fact; 'your wedded wife.'

'so she is, certainly. so she is,' observed the dwarf.

'and she has has a right to do as she likes, i hope, quilp,' said the old lady trembling, partly with anger and partly with a secret fear of her impish son-in-law.

'hope she has!' he replied. 'oh! don't you know she has? don't you know she has, mrs jiniwin?'

'i know she ought to have, quilp, and would have, if she was of my way of thinking.'

'why an't you of your mother's way of thinking, my dear?' said the dwarf, turning round and addressing his wife, 'why don't you imitate your mother, my dear? she's the ornament of her sex--your father said so every day of his life. i am sure he did.'

'her father was a blessed creature, quilp, and worthy twenty thousand of some people,' said mrs jiniwin; 'twenty hundred million thousand.'

'i should like to have known him,' remarked the dwarf. 'i dare say he was a blessed creature then; but i'm sure he is now. it was a happy release. i believe he had suffered a long time?'

the old lady gave a gasp, but nothing came of it; quilp resumed, with the same malice in his eye and the same sarcastic politeness on his tongue.

'you look ill, mrs jiniwin; i know you have been exciting yourself too much--talking perhaps, for it is your weakness. go to bed. do go to bed.'

'i shall go when i please, quilp, and not before.'

'but please to do now. do please to go now,' said the dwarf.

the old woman looked angrily at him, but retreated as he advanced, and falling back before him, suffered him to shut the door upon her and bolt her out among the guests, who were by this time crowding downstairs. being left along with his wife, who sat trembling in a corner with her eyes fixed upon the ground, the little man planted himself before her, and folding his arms looked steadily at her for a long time without speaking.

'mrs quilp,' he said at last.

'yes, quilp,' she pleaded meekly.

instead of pursuing the theme he had in his mind, quilp folded his arms again, and looked at her more sternly than before, while she averted her eyes and kept them on the ground.

'mrs quilp.'

'yes, quilp.'

'if ever you listen to these beldames again, i'll bite you.'

with this laconic threat, which he accompanied with a snarl that gave him the appearance of being particularly in earnest, mr quilp bade her clear the teaboard away, and bring the rum. the spirit being set before him in a huge case-bottle, which had originally come out of some ship's locker, he settled himself in an arm-chair with his large head and face squeezed up against the back, and his little legs planted on the table.

'now, mrs quilp,' he said; 'i feel in a smoking humour, and shall probably blaze away all night. but sit where you are, if you please, in case i want you.'

his wife returned no other reply than the necessary 'yes, quilp,' and the small lord of the creation took his first cigar and mixed his first glass of grog. the sun went down and the stars peeped out, the tower turned from its own proper colours to grey and from grey to black, the room became perfectly dark and the end of the cigar a deep fiery red, but still mr quilp went on smoking and drinking in the same position, and staring listlessly out of window with the doglike smile always on his face, save when mrs quilp made some involuntary movement of restlessness or fatigue; and then it expanded into a grin of delight.

chapter 5

whether mr quilp took any sleep by snatches of a few winks at a time, or whether he sat with his eyes wide open all night long, certain it is that he kept his cigar alight, and kindled every fresh one from the ashes of that which was nearly consumed, without requiring the assistance of a candle. nor did the striking of the clocks, hour after hour, appear to inspire him with any sense of drowsiness or any natural desire to go to rest, but rather to increase his wakefulness, which he showed, at every such indication of the progress of the night, by a suppressed cackling in his throat, and a motion of his shoulders, like one who laughs heartily but the same time slyly and by stealth.

at length the day broke, and poor mrs quilp, shivering with cold of early morning and harassed by fatigue and want of sleep, was discovered sitting patiently on her chair, raising her eyes at intervals in mute appeal to the compassion and clemency of her lord, and gently reminding him by an occasional cough that she was still unpardoned and that her penance had been of long duration. but her dwarfish spouse still smoked his cigar and drank his rum

without heeding her; and it was not until the sun had some time risen, and the activity and noise of city day were rife in the street, that he deigned to recognize her presence by any word or sign. he might not have done so even then, but for certain impatient tapping at the door he seemed to denote that some pretty hard knuckles were actively engaged upon the other side.

'why dear me!' he said looking round with a malicious grin, 'it's day. open the door, sweet mrs quilp!'

his obedient wife withdrew the bolt, and her lady mother entered.

now, mrs jiniwin bounced into the room with great impetuosity; for, supposing her son-in-law to be still a-bed, she had come to relieve her feelings by pronouncing a strong opinion upon his general conduct and character. seeing that he was up and dressed, and that the room appeared to have been occupied ever since she quitted it on the previous evening, she stopped short, in some embarrassment.

nothing escaped the hawk's eye of the ugly little man, who, perfectly understanding what passed in the old lady's mind, turned uglier still in the fulness of his satisfaction, and bade her good morning, with a leer or triumph.

'why, betsy,' said the old woman, 'you haven't been--you don't mean to say you've been a--'

'sitting up all night?' said quilp, supplying the conclusion of the sentence. 'yes she has!'

'all night?' cried mrs jiniwin.

'ay, all night. is the dear old lady deaf?' said quilp, with a smile of which a frown was part. 'who says man and wife are bad company? ha ha! the time has flown.'

'you're a brute!' exclaimed mrs jiniwin.

'come come,' said quilp, wilfully misunderstanding her, of course, 'you mustn't call her names. she's married now, you know. and though she did beguile the time and keep me from my bed, you must not be so tenderly careful of me as to be out of humour with her. bless you for a dear old lady. here's to your health!'

'i am much obliged to you,' returned the old woman, testifying by a certain restlessness in her hands a vehement desire to shake her matronly fist at her son-in-law. 'oh! i'm very much obliged to you!'

'grateful soul!' cried the dwarf. 'mrs quilp.'

'yes, quilp,' said the timid sufferer.

'help your mother to get breakfast, mrs quilp. i am going to the wharf this morning--the earlier the better, so be quick.'

mrs jiniwin made a faint demonstration of rebellion by sitting down in a chair near the door and folding her arms as if in a resolute determination to do nothing. but a few whispered words from her daughter, and a kind inquiry from her son-in-law whether she felt faint, with a hint that there was abundance of cold water in the next apartment, routed these symptoms effectually, and she applied herself to the prescribed preparations with sullen diligence.

while they were in progress, mr quilp withdrew to the adjoining room, and, turning back his coat-collar, proceeded to smear his countenance with a damp towel of very unwholesome appearance, which made his complexion rather more cloudy than it was before. but, while he was thus engaged, his caution and inquisitiveness did not forsake him, for with a face as sharp and cunning as ever, he often stopped, even in this short process, and stood listening for any conversation in the next room, of which he might be the theme.

'ah!' he said after a short effort of attention, 'it was not the towel over my ears, i thought it wasn't. i'm a little hunchy villain and a monster, am i, mrs jiniwin? oh!'

the pleasure of this discovery called up the old doglike smile in full force. when he had quite done with it, he shook himself in a very doglike manner, and rejoined the ladies.

mr quilp now walked up to front of a looking-glass, and was standing there putting on his neckerchief, when mrs jiniwin happening to be behind him, could not resist the inclination she felt to shake her fist at her tyrant son-in-law. it was the gesture of an instant, but as she did so and accompanied the action with a menacing look, she met his eye in the glass, catching her in the very act. the same glance at the mirror conveyed to her the reflection of a horribly grotesque and distorted face with the tongue lolling out; and the next instant the dwarf, turning about with a perfectly bland and placid look, inquired in a tone of great affection.

'how are you now, my dear old darling?'

slight and ridiculous as the incident was, it made him appear such a little fiend, and withal such a keen and knowing one, that the old woman felt too much afraid of him to utter a single word, and suffered herself to be led with extraordinary politeness to the breakfast-table. here he by no means diminished the impression he had just produced, for he ate hard eggs, shell and all, devoured gigantic prawns with the heads and tails on, chewed tobacco and water-cresses at the same time and with extraordinary greediness, drank boiling tea without winking, bit his fork and spoon till they bent again, and in short performed so many horrifying and uncommon acts that the women were nearly frightened out of their wits, and began to doubt if he were really a human creature. at last, having gone through these proceedings and many others which were equally a part of his system, mr quilp left them, reduced to a very obedient and humbled state, and betook himself to the river-side, where he took boat for the wharf on which he had bestowed his name.

it was flood tide when daniel quilp sat himself down in the ferry to cross to the opposite shore. a fleet of barges were coming lazily on, some sideways, some head first, some stern first; all in a wrong-headed, dogged, obstinate way, bumping up against the larger craft, running under the bows of steamboats, getting into every kind of nook and corner where they had no business, and being crunched on all sides like so many walnut-shells; while each with its pair of long sweeps struggling and splashing in the water looked like some lumbering fish in pain. in some of the vessels at anchor all hands were busily engaged in coiling ropes, spreading out sails to dry, taking in or discharging their cargoes; in others no life was visible but two or three tarry boys, and perhaps a barking dog running to and fro upon the deck or scrambling up to look over the side and bark the louder for the view. coming slowly on through the forests of masts was a great steamship, beating the water in short impatient strokes with her heavy paddles as though she wanted room to breathe, and advancing in her huge bulk like a sea monster among the minnows of the thames. on either hand were long black tiers of colliers; between them vessels slowly working out of harbour with sails glistening in the sun, and creaking noise on board, re-echoed from a hundred quarters. the water and all upon it was in active motion, dancing and buoyant and bubbling up; while the old grey tower and piles of building on the shore, with many a church-spire shooting up between, looked coldly on, and seemed to disdain their chafing, restless neighbour.

daniel quilp, who was not much affected by a bright morning save in so far as it spared him the trouble of carrying an umbrella, caused himself to be put ashore hard by the wharf, and proceeded thither through a narrow lane which, partaking of the amphibious character of its frequenters, had as much water as mud in its composition, and a very liberal supply of both. arrived at his destination, the first object that presented itself to his view was a pair of very imperfectly shod feet elevated in the air with the soles upwards, which remarkable appearance was referable to the boy, who being of an eccentric spirit and having a natural taste for tumbling, was now standing on his head and contemplating the aspect of the river under these uncommon circumstances. he was speedily brought on his heels by the sound of his master's voice, and as soon as his head was in its right position, mr quilp, to speak expresively in the absence of a better verb, 'punched it' for him.

'come, you let me alone,' said the boy, parrying quilp's hand with both his elbows alternatively. 'you'll get something you won't like if you don't and so i tell you.'

'you dog,' snarled quilp, 'i'll beat you with an iron rod, i'll scratch you with a rusty nail, i'll pinch your eyes, if you talk to me--i will.'

with these threats he clenched his hand again, and dexterously diving in between the elbows and catching the boy's head as it dodged from side to side, gave it three or four good hard knocks. having now carried his point and insisted on it, he left off.

'you won't do it agin,' said the boy, nodding his head and drawing back, with the elbows ready in case of the worst; 'now--'

'stand still, you dog,' said quilp. 'i won't do it again, because i've done it as often as i want. here. take the key.'

'why don't you hit one of your size?' said the boy approaching very slowly.

'where is there one of my size, you dog?' returned quilp. 'take the key, or i'll brain you with it'--indeed he gave him a smart tap with the handle as he spoke. 'now, open the counting-house.'

the boy sulkily complied, muttering at first, but desisting when he looked round and saw that quilp was following him with a steady look. and here it may be remarked, that between this boy and the dwarf that existed a strange kind of mutual liking. how born or bred, and or nourished upon blows and threats on one side, and retorts and defiances on the other, is not to the purpose. quilp would certainly suffer nobody to contract him but the boy, and the boy would assuredly not have submitted to be so knocked about by anybody but quilp, when he had the power to run away at any time he chose.

'now,' said quilp, passing into the wooden counting-house, 'you mind the wharf. stand upon your head agin, and i'll cut one of your feet off.'

the boy made no answer, but directly quilp had shut himself in, stood on his head before the door, then walked on his hands to the back and stood on his head there, and then to the opposite side and repeated the performance. there were indeed four sides to the counting-house, but he avoided that one where the window was, deeming it probable that quilp would be looking out of it. this was prudent, for in point of fact, the dwarf, knowing his disposition, was lying in wait at a little distance from the sash armed with a large piece of wood, which, being rough and jagged and studded in many parts with broken nails, might possibly have hurt him.

it was a dirty little box, this counting-house, with nothing in it but an old ricketty desk and two stools, a hat-peg, an ancient inkstand with no ink, and the stump of one pen, and an eight-day clock which hadn't gone for eighteen years at least, and of which the minute-hand had been twisted off for a tooth-pick. daniel quilp pulled his hat over his brows, climbed on to the desk (which had a flat top) and stretching his short length upon it went to sleep with ease of an old practitioner; intending, no doubt, to compensate himself for the deprivation of last night's rest, by a long and sound nap.

sound it might have been, but long it was not, for he had not been asleep a quarter of an hour when the boy opened the door and thrust in his head, which was like a bundle of badly-picked oakum. quilp was a light sleeper and started up directly.

'here's somebody for you,' said the boy.

'who?'

'i don't know.'

'ask!' said quilp, seizing the trifle of wood before mentioned and throwing it at him with such dexterity that it was well the boy disappeared before it reached the spot on which he had stood. 'ask, you dog.'

not caring to venture within range of such missiles again, the boy discreetly sent in his stead the first cause of the interruption, who now presented herself at the door.

'what, nelly!' cried quilp.

'yes,' said the child, hesitating whether to enter or retreat, for the dwarf just roused, with his dishevelled hair hanging all about him and a yellow handkerchief over his head, was something fearful to behold; it's only me, sir.'

'come in,' said quilp, without getting off the desk. 'come in. stay. just look out into the yard, and see whether there's a boy standing on his head.'

'no, sir,' replied nell. 'he's on his feet.'

'you're sure he is?' said quilp. 'well. now, come in and shut the door. what's your message, nelly?'

the child handed him a letter. mr quilp, without changing his position further than to turn over a little more on his side and rest his chin on his hand, proceeded to make himself acquainted with its contents.

chapter 6

little nell stood timidly by, with her eyes raised to the countenance of mr quilp as he read the letter, plainly showing by her looks that while she entertained some fear and distrust of the little man, she was much inclined to laugh at his uncouth appearance and grotesque attitude. and yet there was visible on the part of the child a painful anxiety for his reply, and consciousness of his power to render it disagreeable or distressing, which was strongly at variance with this impulse and restrained it more effectually than she could possibly have done by any efforts of her own.

that mr quilp was himself perplexed, and that in no small degree, by the contents of the letter, was sufficiently obvious. before he had got through the first two or three lines he began to open his eyes very wide and to frown most horribly, the next two or three caused him to scratch his head in an uncommonly vicious manner, and when he came to the conclusion he gave a long dismal whistle indicative of surprise and dismay. after folding and laying it down beside him, he bit the nails of all of his ten fingers with extreme voracity; and taking it up sharply, read it again. the second perusal was to all appearance as unsatisfactory as the first, and plunged him into a profound reverie from which he awakened to another assault upon his nails and a long stare at the child, who with her eyes turned towards the ground awaited his further pleasure.

'halloa here!' he said at length, in a voice, and with a suddenness, which made the child start as though a gun had been fired off at her ear. 'nelly!'

'yes, sir.'

'do you know what's inside this letter, nell?'

'no, sir!'

'are you sure, quite sure, quite certain, upon your soul?'

'quite sure, sir.'

'do you wish you may die if you do know, hey?' said the dwarf. 'indeed i don't know,' returned the child. 'well!' muttered quilp as he marked her earnest look. 'i believe you. humph! gone already? gone in four-and-twenty hours! what the devil has he done with it, that's the mystery!'

this reflection set him scratching his head and biting his nails once more. while he was thus employed his features gradually relaxed into what was with him a cheerful smile, but which in any other man would have been a ghastly grin of pain, and when the child looked up again she found that he was regarding her with extraordinary favour and complacency.

'you look very pretty to-day, nelly, charmingly pretty. are you tired, nelly?'

'no, sir. i'm in a hurry to get back, for he will be anxious while i am away.'

'there's no hurry, little nell, no hurry at all,' said quilp. 'how should you like to be my number two, nelly?'

'to be what, sir?'

'my number two, nelly, my second, my mrs quilp,' said the dwarf. the child looked frightened, but seemed not to understand him, which mr quilp observing, hastened to make his meaning more distinctly.

'to be mrs quilp the second, when mrs quilp the first is dead, sweet nell,' said quilp, wrinkling up his eyes and luring her towards him with his bent forefinger, 'to be my wife, my little cherry-cheeked, red-lipped wife. say that mrs quilp lives five year, or only four, you'll be just the proper age for me. ha ha! be a good girl, nelly, a very good girl, and see if one of these days you don't come to be mrs quilp of tower hill.'

so far from being sustained and stimulated by this delightful prospect, the child shrank from him in great agitation, and trembled violently. mr quilp, either because frightening anybody afforded him a constitutional delight, or because it was pleasant to contemplate the death of mrs quilp number one, and the elevation of mrs quilp number two to her post and title, or because he was determined from purposes of his own to be agreeable and good-humoured at that particular time, only laughed and feigned to take no heed of her alarm.

'you shall home with me to tower hill and see mrs quilp that is, directly,' said the dwarf. 'she's very fond of you, nell, though not so fond as i am. you shall come home with me.'

'i must go back indeed,' said the child. 'he told me to return directly i had the answer.'

'but you haven't it, nelly,' retorted the dwarf, 'and won't have it, and can't have it, until i have been home, so you see that to do your errand, you must go with me. reach me yonder hat, my dear, and we'll go directly.' with that, mr quilp suffered himself to roll gradually off the desk until his short legs touched the ground, when he got upon them and led the way from the counting-house to the wharf outside, when the first objects that presented themselves were the boy who had stood on his head and another young gentleman of about his own stature, rolling in the mud together, locked in a tight embrace, and cuffing each other with mutual heartiness.

'it's kit!' cried nelly, clasping her hand, 'poor kit who came with me! oh, pray stop them, mr quilp!'

'i'll stop 'em,' cried quilp, diving into the little counting-house and returning with a thick stick, 'i'll stop 'em. now, my boys, fight away. i'll fight you both. i'll take bot of you, both together, both together!'

with which defiance the dwarf flourished his cudgel, and dancing round the combatants and treading upon them and skipping over them, in a kind of frenzy, laid about him, now on one and now on the other, in a most desperate manner, always aiming at their heads and dealing such blows as none but the veriest little savage would have inflicted. this being warmer work than they had calculated upon, speedily cooled the courage of the belligerents, who scrambled to their feet and called for quarter.

'i'll beat you to a pulp, you dogs,' said quilp, vainly endeavoring to get near either of them for a parting blow. 'i'll bruise you until you're copper-coloured, i'll break your faces till you haven't a profile between you, i will.'

'come, you drop that stick or it'll be worse for you,' said his boy, dodging round him and watching an opportunity to rush in; 'you drop that stick.'

'come a little nearer, and i'll drop it on your skull, you dog,' said quilp, with gleaming eyes; 'a little nearer--nearer yet.'

but the boy declined the invitation until his master was apparently a little off his guard, when he darted in and seizing the weapon tried to wrest it from his grasp. quilp, who was as strong as a lion, easily kept his hold until the boy was tugging at it with his utmost power, when he suddenly let it go and sent him reeling backwards, so that he fell violently upon his head. the success of this manoeuvre tickled mr quilp beyond description, and he laughed and stamped upon the ground as at a most irresistible jest.

'never mind,' said the boy, nodding his head and rubbing it at the same time; 'you see if ever i offer to strike anybody again because they say you're an uglier dwarf than can be seen anywheres for a penny, that's all.'

'do you mean to say, i'm not, you dog?' returned quilp.

'no!' retorted the boy.

'then what do you fight on my wharf for, you villain?' said quilp. 'because he said so,' replied to boy, pointing to kit, 'not because you an't.'

'then why did he say,' bawled kit, 'that miss nelly was ugly, and that she and my master was obliged to do whatever his master liked? why did he say that?'

'he said what he did because he's a fool, and you said what you did because you're very wise and clever--almost too clever to live, unless you're very careful of yourself, kit.' said quilp, with great

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