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Master Humphrey's Clock: Barnaby Rudge: Part 56

Charles Dickens

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MASTER

NIRVARES

GLOCK

BY "BOZ"

SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 1841.

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CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH.

DOLLY VARDEN's pretty little head was yet bewildered by various recollections of the party, and her bright eyes were yet dazzled by a crowd of images, dancing before them like motes in the sunbeams, among which the effigy of one partner in particular did especially figure, the same being a young coach-maker (a master in his own right) who had given her to understand, when he handed her into the chair at parting, that it was his fixed resolve to neglect his business from that time, and die slowly for the love of her—Dolly's head, and eyes, and thoughts, and seven senses, were all in a state of flutter and confusion for which the party was accountable, although it was now three days old, when, as she was sitting listlessly at breakfast, reading all manner of fortunes (that is to say, of married and flourishing fortunes) in the grounds of her teacup, a step was heard in the workshop, and Mr. Edward Chester was discovered through the glass door, standing among the rusty locks and keys, like love among the roses—for which apt comparison the historian may by no means take any credit to himself, the same being the invention, in a sentimental mood, of the chaste and modest Miggs, who, beholding him from the doorsteps she was then cleaning, did, in her maiden meditation, give utterance to the simile.

The locksmith, who happened at the moment to have his eyes thrown upward and his head backward, in an intense communing with Toby, did not see his visitor, until Mrs. Varden, more watchful than the rest, had desired Sim Tappertit to open the glass door and give him admission—from which untoward circumstance the good lady argued (for she could deduce a precious moral from the most trifling event) that to take a draught of small ale in the morning was to observe a pernicious, irreligious, and Pagan custom, the relish whereof should be left to swine, and Satan, or at least to Popish persons, and should be shunned by the righteous as a work of sin and evil. She would no doubt have pursued her admonition much further, and would have founded on it a long list of precious precepts of inestimable value, but that the young gentleman standing by in a somewhat uncomfortable and discomfited manner while she read her spouse this lecture, occasioned her to bring it to a premature conclusion.

"I'm sure you'll excuse me sir," said Mrs. Varden, rising and curtseying. "Varden is so very thoughtless, and needs so much reminding—Sim, bring a chair here."

Mr. Tappertit obeyed, with a flourish implying that he did so, under protest.

"And you can go, Sim" said the locksmith. Mr. Tappertit obeyed again, still under protest; and betaking himself to the vol. III.—56.
workshop, began seriously to fear that he might find it necessary to poison his master, before his time was out.

In the meantime, Edward returned suitable replies to Mrs. Varden’s courteous, and that lady brightened up very much; so that when he accepted a dish of tea from the fair hands of Dolly, she was perfectly agreeable.

“I am sure if there’s anything we can do,—Varden, or I, or Dolly either,—to serve you, sir, at any time, you have only to say it, and it shall be done,” said Mrs. V.

“I am much obliged to you, I am sure” returned Edward. “You encourage me to say that I have come here now, to beg your good offices.”

Mrs. Varden was delighted beyond measure.

“It occurred to me that probably your fair daughter might be going to the Warren, either to-day or to-morrow” said Edward, glancing at Dolly; “and if so, and you will allow her to take charge of this letter, Ma’am, you will oblige me more than I can tell you. The truth is, that while I am very anxious it should reach its destination, I have particular reasons for not trusting it to any other conveyance; so that without your help, I am wholly at a loss.”

“She was not going that way sir, either to-day, or to-morrow, nor indeed all next week,” the lady graciously rejoined, “but we shall be very glad to put ourselves out of the way on your account, and if you wish it, you may depend upon its going to-day. You might suppose” said Mrs. Varden, frowning at her husband, “from Varden’s sitting there so glum and silent, that he objected to this arrangement; but you must not mind that, sir, if you please. It’s his way at home. Out of doors, he can be cheerful and talkative enough.”

Now, the fact was, that the unfortunate locksmith, blessing his stars to find his helper in such good humour, had been sitting with a beaming face, hearing this discourse with a joy past all expression. Wherefore this sudden attack quite took him by surprise.

“My dear Martha—” he said.

“Oh yes, I dare say” interrupted Mrs. Varden, with a smile of mingled scorn and pleasantry. “Very dear! We all know that.”

“No, but my good soul” said Gabriel, “you are quite mistaken. You are indeed. I was delighted to find you so kind and ready. I waited, my dear, anxiously, I assure you, to hear what you would say.”

“You waited anxiously,” repeated Mrs. V. “Yes! Thank you, Varden. You waited, as you always do, that I might bear the blame, if any came of it. But I am used to it,” said the lady with a kind of solemn titter, “and that’s my comfort!”

“I give you my word, Martha—” said Gabriel.

“Let me give you my word, my dear,” interposed his wife with a christian smile, “that such discussions as these between married people, are much better left alone. Therefore, if you please Varden, we’ll drop the subject. I have
no wish to pursue it. I could. I might say a great deal. But I would rather not. Pray don't say any more."

"I don't want to say any more," rejoined the goaded locksmith.

"Well then, don't," said Mrs. Varden.

"Nor did I begin it Martha," added the locksmith, good humouredly, "I must say that."

"You did not begin it, Varden!" exclaimed his wife, opening her eyes very wide and looking round upon the company, as though she would say, You hear this man! "You did not begin it, Varden! But you shall not say I was out of temper. No, you did not begin it, oh dear no, not you, my dear!"

"Well, well," said the locksmith. "That's settled then."

"Oh yes," rejoined his wife, "quite. If you like to say Dolly began it, my dear, I shall not contradict you. I know my duty. I need know it, I am sure. I am often obliged to bear it in mind, when my inclination perhaps would be for the moment to forget it. Thank you, Varden." And so, with a mighty show of humility and forgiveness, she folded her hands, and looked round again, with a smile which plainly said "If you desire to see the first and foremost among female martyrs, here she is, on view!"

This little incident, illustrative though it was of Mrs. Varden's extraordinary sweetness and amiability, had so strong a tendency to check the conversation and to disconcert all parties but that excellent lady, that only a few monosyllables were uttered until Edward withdrew; which he presently did, thanking the lady of the house a great many times for her condescension, and whispering in Dolly's ear that he would call on the morrow, in case there should happen to be an answer to the note—which, indeed, she knew without his telling, as Barnaby and his friend Grip had dropped in on the previous night to prepare her for the visit which was then terminating.

Gabriel, who had attended Edward to the door, came back with his hands in his pockets; and, after fidgeting about the room in a very uneasy manner, and casting a great many sidelong looks at Mrs. Varden (who with the calmest countenance in the world was five fathoms deep in the Protestant Manual), inquired of Dolly how she meant to go. Dolly supposed by the stage-coach, and looked at her lady mother, who finding herself silently appealed to, dived down at least another fathom into the Manual, and became unconscious of all earthly things.

"Martha—" said the locksmith.

"I hear you, Varden," said his wife, without rising to the surface.

"I am sorry, my dear, you have such an objection to the Maypole and old John, for otherways as it's a very fine morning, and Saturday's not a busy day with us, we might have all three gone to Chigwell in the chaise, and had quite a happy day of it."

Mrs. Varden immediately closed the Manual, and bursting into tears, requested to be led up-stairs.

"What is the matter now Martha?" inquired the locksmith.
To which Martha rejoined "Oh! don't speak to me," and protested in agony that if anybody had told her so, she wouldn't have believed it.

"But Martha" said Gabriel, putting himself in the way as she was moving off with the aid of Dolly's shoulder, "wouldn't have believed what? Tell me what's wrong now. Do tell me. Upon my soul I don't know. Do you know child? Damme!" cried the locksmith, plucking at his wig in a kind of frenzy, "nobody does know, I verily believe, but Miggs!"

"Miggs," said Mrs. Varden faintly, and with symptoms of approaching incoherence, "is attached to me, and that is sufficient to draw down hatred upon her in this house. She is a comfort to me, whatever she may be to others."

"She's no comfort to me," cried Gabriel, made bold by despair. "She's the misery of my life. She's all the plagues of Egypt in one."

"She's considered so, I have no doubt," said Mrs. Varden. "I was prepared for that; it's natural; it's of a piece with the rest. When you taunt me as you do to my face, how can I wonder that you taunt her behind her back?" And here the incoherence coming on very strong, Mrs. Varden wept, and laughed, and sobbed, and shivered, and hiccupped, and choked; and said she knew it was very foolish but she couldn't help it; and that when she was dead and gone, perhaps they would be sorry for it—which really under the circumstances did not appear quite so probable as she seemed to think—with a great deal more to the same effect. In a word, she passed with great decency through all the ceremonies incidental to such occasions; and being supported up-stairs, was deposited in a highly spasmodic state on her own bed, where Miss Miggs shortly afterwards flung herself upon the body.

The philosophy of all this was, that Mrs. Varden wanted to go to Chigwell; that she did not want to make any concession or explanation; that she would only go on being implored and entreated so to do; and that she would accept no other terms. Accordingly, after a vast amount of moaning and crying up-stairs, and much darning of foreheads, and vinegaring of temples, and hartshorning of noses, and so forth; and after most pathetic adjurations from Miggs, assisted by warm brandy-and-water not over-weak, and divers other cordials, also of a stimulating quality, administered at first in teaspoonsful and afterwards in increasing doses, and of which Miss Miggs herself partook as a preventive measure (for fainting is infectious); after all these remedies, and many more too numerous to mention, but not to take, had been applied; and many verbal consolations, moral, religious, and miscellaneous, had been superadded thereto; the locksmith humbled himself, and the end was gained.

"If it's only for the sake of peace and quietness, father," said Dolly, urging him to go up-stairs.

"Oh, Doll, Doll," said her good-natured father. "If you ever have a husband of your own—" Dolly glanced at the glass.

"—Well, when you have," said the locksmith, "never faint, my darling.
More domestic unhappiness has come of easy fainting, Doll, than from all the
greater passions put together. Remember that, my dear, if you would be
really happy, which you never can be, if your husband isn’t. And a word in
your ear, my precious. Never have a Miggs about you!”

With this advice he kissed his blooming daughter on the cheek, and slowly
repaired to Mrs. Varden’s room; where that lady, lying all pale and languid
on her couch, was refreshing herself with a sight of her last new bonnet, which
Miggs, as a means of calming her scattered spirits, displayed to the best
advantage at her bedside.

“Here’s master, mim,” said Miggs. “Oh, what a happiness it is when man
and wife come round again! Oh gracious, to think that him and her should
ever have a word together!” In the energy of these sentiments, which were
uttered as an apostrophe to the Heavens in general, Miss Miggs perched the
bonnet on the top of her own head, and folding her hands, turned on her
tears.

“I can’t help it,” cried Miggs. “I couldn’t, if I was to be drowned in ’em.
She has such a forgiving spirit! She’ll forget all that has passed, and
and you, sir—Oh, if it was to the world’s end, she’d go along with you.”

Mrs. Varden with a faint smile gently reproved her attendant for this
enthusiasm, and reminded her at the same time that she was far too unwell
to venture out that day.

“Oh no, you’re not, mim, indeed you’re not,” said Miggs; “I repeal to
master; master knows you’re not, mim. The hair, and motion of the shay,
will do you good, mim, and you must not give way, you must not raly. She
must keep up mustn’t she, sir, for all our sakes? I was a telling her that, just
now. She must remember us, even if she forgets herself. Master will persuade
you, mim, I’m sure. There’s Miss Dolly’s a going you know, and master, and
you, and all so happy and so comfortable. Oh!” cried Miggs, turning on the
tears again, previous to quitting the room in great emotion, “I never see such
a blessed one as she is for the forgiveness of her spirit, I never, never, never
did. Nor more did master neither; no, nor no one—never!”

For five minutes or thereabouts, Mrs. Varden remained mildly opposed to
all her husband’s prayers that she would oblige him by taking a day’s pleasure,
but relenting at length, she suffered herself to be persuaded, and granting him
her free forgiveness (the merit whereof, she meekly said, rested with the
Manual and not with her), desired that Miggs might come and help her dress.
The handmaid attended promptly, and it is but justice to their joint exertions
to record that, when the good lady came down-stairs in course of time,
completely decked out for the journey, she really looked as if nothing had
happened, and appeared in the very best health imaginable.

As to Dolly, there she was again, the very pink and pattern of good looks,
in a smart little cherry-coloured mantle, with a hood of the same drawn over
her head, and upon the top of that hood, a little straw hat trimmed with
cherry-coloured ribbons, and worn the merest trifle on one side—just enough
in short to make it the wickedest and most provoking head-dress that ever malicious milliner devised. And not to speak of the manner in which these cherry-coloured decorations brightened her eyes, or vied with her lips, or shed a new bloom on her face, she wore such a cruel little muff; and such a heart-rending pair of shoes, and was so surrounded and hemmed in, as it were, by aggravations of all kinds, that when Mr. Tappertit, holding the horse's head, saw her come out of the house alone, such impulses came over him to decoy her into the chaise and drive off like mad, that he would unquestionably have done it, but for certain uneasy doubts besetting him as to the shortest way to Gretna Green; whether it was up the street or down, or up the right-hand turning or the left; and whether, supposing all the turnpikes to be carried by storm, the blacksmith in the end would marry them on credit; which by reason of his clerical office appeared, even to his excited imagination, so unlikely, that he hesitated. And while he stood hesitating, and looking post-chaises-and-six at Dolly, out came his master and his mistress, and the constant Miggs, and the opportunity was gone for ever. For now the chaise creaked upon its springs, and Mrs. Varden was inside; and now it creaked again, and more than ever, and the locksmith was inside; and now it bounded once, as if its heart beat lightly; and Dolly was inside; and now it was gone and its place was empty, and he and that dreary Miggs were standing in the street together.

The hearty locksmith was in as good a humour as if nothing had occurred for the last twelve months to put him out of his way. Dolly was all smiles and graces, and Mrs. Varden was agreeable beyond all precedent. As they jogged through the streets talking of this thing and of that, who should be descried upon the pavement but that very coachmaker, looking so genteel that nobody would have believed he had ever had anything to do with a coach but riding in it, and bowing like any nobleman. To be sure Dolly was confused when she bowed again, and to be sure the cherry-coloured ribbons trembled a little when she met his mournful eye, which seemed to say, 'I have kept my word, I have begun, the business is going to the devil, and you're the cause of it.' There he stood, rooted to the ground: as Dolly said, like a statue; and as Mrs. Varden said, like a pump; till they turned the corner: and when her father thought it was like his impudence, and her mother wondered what he meant by it, Dolly blushed again till her very hood was pale.

But on they went, not the less merrily for this, and there was the locksmith in the incautious fulness of his heart "pulling-up" at all manner of places, and evincing a most intimate acquaintance with all the taverns on the road, and all the landlords and all the landladies, with whom, indeed, the little horse was on equally friendly terms, for he kept on stopping of his own accord. Never were people so glad to see other people as these landlords and landladies were to behold Mr. Varden and Mrs. Varden and Miss Varden; and wouldn't they get out, said one; and they really must walk up-stairs; said another, and she would take it ill and be quite certain they were proud if they wouldn't have a little taste of something, said a third; and so on, that it really was
In course of time—and in course of a pretty long time too, for these agreeable interruptions delayed them not a little,—they arrived upon the skirts of the Forest, and riding pleasantly on among the trees, came at last to the Maypole, where the locksmith's cheerful "Yoho!" speedily brought to the porch old John, and after him young Joe, both of whom were so transfixed at the sight of the ladies, that for a moment they were perfectly unable to give them any welcome, and could do nothing but stare.

It was only for a moment, however, that Joe forgot himself, for speedily reviving he thrust his drowsy father aside—to Mr. Willet's mighty and inexpressible indignation—and darting out, stood ready to help them to alight. It was necessary for Dolly to get out first. Joe had her in his arms;—yes, though for a space of time no longer than you could count one in, Joe had her in his arms. Here was a glimpse of happiness!

It would be difficult to describe what a flat and commonplace affair the helping Mrs. Varden out afterwards was, but Joe did it, and did it too with the best grace in the world. Then old John, who, entertaining a dull and foggy sort of idea that Mrs. Varden wasn't fond of him, had been in some doubt whether she might not have come for purposes of assault and battery, took courage, hoped she was well, and offered to conduct her into the house. This tender being amicably received, they marched in together; Joe and Dolly followed, arm-in-arm, (happiness again!) and Varden brought up the rear.

Old John would have it that they must sit in the bar, and nobody objecting, into the bar they went. All bars are snug places, but the Maypole's was the very suggestest, cosiest, and completest bar, that ever the wit of man devised. Such amazing bottles in old oaken pigeon-holes; such gleaming tankards dangling from pegs at about the same inclination as thirsty men would hold them to their lips; such sturdy little Dutch kegs ranged in rows on shelves; so many lemons hanging in separate nets, and forming the fragrant grove already mentioned in this chronicle, suggestive, with goodly loaves of snowy sugar stowed away hard by, of punch, idealised beyond all mortal knowledge; such closets, such presses, such drawers full of pipes, such places for putting things away in hollow window-seats, all crammed to the throat with eatables, drinkables, or savoury condiments; lastly, and to crown all, as typical of the immense resources of the establishment, and its defiances to all visitors to cut and come again, such a stupendous cheese!

It is a poor heart that never rejoices—it must have been the poorest, weakest, and most watery heart that ever beat, which would not have warmed towards the Maypole bar. Mrs. Varden's did directly. She could no more have reproached John Willet among those household gods, the kegs and
bottles, lemons, pipes, and cheese, than she could have stabbed him with his
own bright carving-knife. The order for dinner too—it might have soothed
a savage. "A bit of fish," said John to the cook, "and some lamb
chops (breaded, with plenty of ketchup), and a good salad, and a roast
spring chicken, with a dish of sausages and mashed potatoes, or something of
that sort." Something of that sort! The resources of these imps! To talk
carelessly about dishes, which in themselves were a first-rate holiday kind of
dinner, suitable to one's wedding day, as something of that sort: meaning, if
you can't get a spring chicken, any other trifle in the way of poultry will do—
such as a Peacock, perhaps! The kitchen too, with its great broad cavern-
ous chimney; the kitchen, where nothing in the way of cookery seemed
impossible; where you could believe in anything to eat, they chose to tell you
of. Mrs. Varden returned from the contemplation of these wonders to the
bar again, with a head quite dizzy and bewildered. Her housekeeping
capacity was not large enough to comprehend them. She was obliged to
go to sleep. Waking was pain, in the midst of such immensity.

Dolly in the meanwhile, whose gay heart and head ran upon other matters,
passed out at the garden door, and glancing back now and then (but of course
not wondering whether Joe saw her), tripped away by a path across the fields
with which she was well acquainted, to discharge her mission at the Warren;
and this deponent hath been informed and verily believes, that you might have
seen many less pleasant objects than the cherry-coloured mantle and ribbons,
as they went fluttering along the green meadows in the bright light of the
day, like giddy things as they were.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH.

The proud consciousness of her trust, and the great importance she derived
from it, might have advertised it to all the house if she had had to run the
gauntlet of its inhabitants; but as Dolly had played in every dull room and
passage many and many a time, when a child, and had ever since been the
humble friend of Miss Haredale, whose foster-sister she was, she was as free of
the building as the young lady herself. So, using no greater precaution
than holding her breath and walking on tiptoe as she passed the library door,
she went straight to Emma's room as a privileged visitor.

It was the liveliest room in the building. The chamber was sombre like
the rest for the matter of that, but the presence of youth and beauty would
make a prison cheerful (saving alas! that confinement withers them), and
lend some charms of their own to the gloomiest scene. Birds, flowers
books, drawing, music, and a hundred such graceful tokens of feminine loves
and cares, filled it with more of life and human sympathy than the whole
house besides seemed made to hold. There was heart in the room; and who
that has a heart, ever fails to recognize the silent presence of another!

Dolly had one undoubtedly, and it was not a tough one either, though there
was a little mist of coquettness about it, such as sometimes surrounds that
sun of life in its morning, and slightly dims its lustre. Thus, when Emma rose to greet her, and kissing her affectionately on the cheek, told her, in her quiet way, that she had been very unhappy, the tears stood in Dolly’s eyes, and she felt more sorry than she could tell; but next moment she happened to raise them to the glass, and really there was something there so exceedingly agreeable, that as she sighed, she smiled, and felt surprisingly consoled.

“I have heard about it Miss,” said Dolly, “and it’s very sad indeed, but when things are at the worst they are sure to mend.”

“But are you sure they are at the worst?” asked Emma with a smile.

“Why, I don’t see how they can very well be more unpromising than they are; I really don’t,” said Dolly. “And I bring something to begin with.”

“Not from Edward!”

Dolly nodded and smiled, and feeling in her pockets (there were pockets in those days) with an affectation of not being able to find what she wanted, which greatly enhanced her importance, at length produced the letter. As Emma hastily broke the seal and became absorbed in its contents, Dolly’s eyes, by one of those strange accidents for which there is no accounting, wandered to the glass again. She could not help wondering whether the coachmaker suffered very much, and quite pitied the poor man.

It was a long letter—a very long letter, written close on all four sides of the sheet of paper, and crossed afterwards; but it was not a consolatory letter, for as Emma read it she stopped from time to time to put her handkerchief to her eyes. To be sure Dolly marvelled greatly to see her in so much distress, for to her thinking a love affair ought to be one of the best jokes, and the slyest, merriest kind of thing in life. But she set it down in her own mind that all
this came from Miss Haredale's being so constant, and that if she would only take on with some other young gentleman—just in the most innocent way possible, to keep her first lover up to the mark—she would find herself inexpressibly comforted.

"I am sure that's what I should do if it was me," thought Dolly. "To make one's sweethearts miserable is well enough and quite right, but to be made miserable one's self is a little too much!"

However it wouldn't do to say so, and therefore she sat looking on in silence. She needed a pretty considerable stretch of patience, for when the long letter had been read once all through it was read again, and when it had been read twice all through it was read again. During this tedious process, Dolly beguiled the time in the most improving manner that occurred to her, by curling her hair on her fingers, with the aid of the looking-glass before mentioned, and giving it some killing twists.

Everything has an end. Even young ladies in love cannot read their letters for ever. In course of time the packet was folded up, and it only remained to write the answer.

But as this promised to be a work of time likewise, Emma said she would put it off until after dinner, and that Dolly must dine with her. As Dolly had made up her mind to do so beforehand, she required very little pressing; and when they had settled this point, they went to walk in the garden.

They strolled up and down the terrace walks, talking incessantly—at least, Dolly never left off once—and making that quarter of the sad and mournful house quite gay. Not that they talked loudly or laughed much, but they were both so very handsome, and it was such a breezy day, and their light dresses and dark curls appeared so free and joyous in their abandonment, and Emma was so fair, and Dolly so rosy, and Emma so delicately shaped, and Dolly so plump, and—in short, there are no flowers for any garden like such flowers, let horticulturists say what they may, and both house and garden seemed to know it, and to brighten up sensibly.

After this, came the dinner and the letter writing, and some more talking, in the course of which Miss Haredale took occasion to charge upon Dolly certain flirtish and inconstant propensities, which accusations Dolly seemed to think very complimentary indeed, and to be mightily amused with. Finding her quite incorrigible in this respect, Emma suffered her to depart; but not before she had confided to her that important and never-sufficiently-to-be-taken-care-of answer, and endowed her moreover with a pretty little bracelet as a keepsake. Having clasped it on her arm, and again advised her half in jest and half in earnest to amend her roguish ways, for she knew she was fond of Joe at heart (which Dolly stoutly denied, with a great many haughty protestations that she hoped she could do better than that indeed! and so forth), she bade her farewell; and after calling her back to give her more supplementary messages for Edward, than anybody with tenfold the gravity of Dolly Varden could be reasonably expected to remember, at length dismissed her.

Dolly bade her good bye, and tripping lightly down the stairs arrived at the dreaded library door, and was about to pass it again on tiptoe, when it opened,
and behold! there stood Mr. Haredale. Now, Dolly had from her childhood associated with this gentleman the idea of something grim and ghostly, and being at the moment conscience-stricken besides, the sight of him threw her into such a flurry that she could neither acknowledge his presence nor run away, so she gave a great start, and then with downcast eyes stood still and trembled.

"Come here, girl" said Mr. Haredale, taking her by the hand. "I want to speak to you."

"If you please sir, I'm in a hurry," faltered Dolly, "and— and you have frightened me by coming so suddenly upon me sir—I would rather go sir, if you'll be so good as to let me."

"Immediately," said Mr. Haredale, who had by this time led her into the room and closed the door. "You shall go directly. You have just left Emma?"

"Yes sir, just this minute.—Father's waiting for me sir, if you'll please to have the goodness——."

"I know. I know," said Mr. Haredale. "Answer me a question. What did you bring here to-day?"

"Bring here, sir?" faltered Dolly.

"You will tell me the truth, I am sure. Yes."

Dolly hesitated for a little while, and somewhat emboldened by his manner, said at last, "Well then sir. It was a letter."

"From Mr. Edward Chester, of course. And you are the bearer of the answer?"

Dolly hesitated again, and not being able to decide upon any other course of action, burst into tears.

"You alarm yourself without cause," said Mr. Haredale. "Why are you so foolish? Surely you can answer me. You know that I have but to put the question to Emma and learn the truth directly. Have you the answer with you?"

Dolly had what is popularly called a spirit of her own, and being now fairly at bay, made the best of it.

"Yes sir," she rejoined, trembling and frightened as she was. "Yes sir, I have. You may kill me if you please sir, but I won't give it up. I'm very sorry,—but I won't. There sir."

"I commend your firmness, and your plain-speaking," said Mr. Haredale. "Rest assured that I have as little desire to take your letter as your life. You are a very discreet messenger and a good girl."

Not feeling quite certain, as she afterwards said, whether he might not be "coming over her" with these compliments, Dolly kept as far from him as she could, cried again, and resolved to defend her pocket (for the letter was there) to the last extremity.

"I have some design" said Mr. Haredale after a short silence, during which a smile, as he regarded her, had struggled through the gloom and melancholy that was natural to his face, "of providing a companion for my niece; for her life is a very lonely one. Would you like the office? You are the oldest friend she has, and the best entitled to it."

"I don't know sir," answered Dolly, not sure but he was bantering her; "I can't say. I don't know what they might wish at home. I couldn't give an opinion sir."
"If your friends had no objection, would you have any?" said Mr. Haredale. "Come. There's a plain question; and easy to answer."

"None at all that I know of sir," replied Dolly. "I should be very glad to be near Miss Emma of course, and always am."

"That's well," said Mr. Haredale. "That is all I had to say. You are anxious to go. Don't let me detain you."

Dolly didn't let him, nor did she wait for him to try, for the words had no sooner passed his lips than she was out of the room, out of the house, and in the fields again.

The first thing to be done, of course, when she came to herself and considered what a flurry she had been in, was to cry afresh; and the next thing, when she reflected how well she had got over it, was to laugh heartily. The tears once banished gave place to the smiles, and at last Dolly laughed so much that she was fain to lean against a tree, and give vent to her exultation.

The twilight had come on, and it was quickly growing dusk, but the path was so familiar to her from frequent traversing that she hardly thought of this, and certainly felt no uneasiness at being alone. Moreover, there was the bracelet to admire; and when she had got it a good rub, and held it out at arm's length, it sparkled and glittered so beautifully on her wrist, that to look at it in every point of view and with every possible turn of the arm, was quite an absorbing business.

There was the letter, too, and it looked so mysterious and knowing, when she took it out of her pocket, and it held, as she knew, so much inside, that to turn it over and over, and think about it, and wonder how it began, and how it ended, and what it said all through, was another matter of constant occupation. Between the bracelet and the letter, there was quite enough to do without thinking of anything else; and admiring each by turns, Dolly went on gaily.

As she passed through a wicket gate to where the path was narrow, and lay between two hedges garnished here and there with trees, she heard a rustling close at hand, which brought her to a sudden stop. She listened. All was very quiet, and she went on again—not absolutely frightened, but a little quicker than before perhaps, and possibly not quite so much at her ease, for a check of that kind is startling.

She had no sooner moved on again, than she was conscious of the same sound, which was like that of a person trampling stealthily among bushes and brushwood. Looking towards the spot whence it appeared to come, she almost fancied she could make out a crouching figure. She stopped again. All was quiet as before. On she went once more—decidedly faster now—and tried to sing softly to herself. It must be the wind.

But how came the wind to blow only when she walked, and cease when she stood still? She stopped involuntarily as she made the reflection, and the rustling noise stopped likewise. She was really frightened now, and was yet hesitating what to do, when the bushes crackled and snapped, and a man came plunging through them, close before her,
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