

“I shall find out that my husband has a mine of purpose and energy, and will turn it to the best account?”

“I hope so, dearest Lizzie,” said Eugene, wistfully, and yet somewhat whimsically. “I hope so. But I can’t summon the vanity to think so. How can I think so, looking back on such a trifling wasted youth as mine! I humbly hope it; but I daren’t believe it. There is a sharp misgiving in my conscience that if I were to live, I should disappoint your good opinion and my own—and that I ought to die, my dear!”

CHAPTER XII.

THE PASSING SHADOW.

THE winds and tides rose and fell a certain number of times, the earth moved round the sun a certain number of times, the ship upon the ocean made her voyage safely, and brought a baby-Bella home. Then who so blest and happy as Mrs. John Rokesmith, saving and excepting Mr. John Rokesmith!

“Would you not like to be rich *now*, my darling?”

“How can you ask me such a question, John dear? Am I not rich?”

These were among the first words spoken near the baby Bella as she lay asleep. She soon proved to be a baby of wonderful intelligence, evincing the strongest objection to her grandmother’s society, and being invariably seized with a painful acidity of the stomach when that dignified lady honored her with any attention.

It was charming to see Bella contemplating this baby, and finding out her own dimples in that tiny reflection, as if she were looking in the glass without personal vanity. Her cherubic father justly remarked to her husband that the baby seemed to make her younger than before, reminding him of the days when she had a pet doll and used to talk to it as she carried it about. The world might have been challenged to produce another baby who had such a store of pleasant nonsense said and sung to it, as Bella said and sung to this baby;

or who was dressed and undressed as often in four-and-twenty hours as Bella dressed and undressed this baby; or who was held behind doors and poked out to stop its father's way when he came home, as this baby was; or, in a word, who did half the number of baby things, through the lively invention of a gay and proud young mother, that this inexhaustible baby did.

The inexhaustible baby was two or three months old, when Bella began to notice a cloud upon her husband's brow. Watching it, she saw a gathering and deepening anxiety there, which caused her great disquiet. More than once, she awoke him muttering in his sleep; and, though he muttered nothing worse than her own name, it was plain to her that his restlessness originated in some load of care. Therefore, Bella at length put in her claim to divide this load, and bear her half of it.

"You know, John dear," she said, cheerily reverting to their former conversation, "that I hope I may safely be trusted in great things. And it surely cannot be a little thing that causes you so much uneasiness. "It's very considerate of you to try to hide from me that you are uncomfortable about something, but it's quite impossible to be done, John love."

"I admit that I am rather uneasy, my own."

"Then please to tell me what about, sir."

But no, he evaded that. "Never mind!" thought Bella, resolutely. "John requires me to put perfect faith in him, and he shall not be disappointed."

She went up to London one day, to meet him, in order that they might make some purchases. She found him waiting for her at her journey's end, and they walked away together through the streets. He was in gay spirits, though still harping on that notion of their being rich; and he said, now let them make believe that yonder fine carriage was theirs, and that it was waiting to take them home to a fine house they had; what would Bella, in that case, best like to find in the house? Well! Bella didn't know: already having everything she wanted, she couldn't say. But, by degrees she was led on to confess that she would like to have for the inexhaustible baby such a nursery as never was seen. It was to be "a very rainbow for colours," as she was quite sure baby noticed colours; and the staircase was to be adorned with the most exquisite flowers, as she was absolutely certain baby



LIGHTWOOD AT LAST.

noticed flowers; and there was to be an aviary somewhere, of the loveliest little birds, as there was not the smallest doubt in the world that baby noticed birds. Was there nothing else? No, John dear. The predilections of the inexhaustible baby being provided for, Bella could think of nothing else.

They were chatting on in this way, and John had suggested, "No jewels for your own wear, for instance?" and Bella had replied laughing. O! if he came to that, yes, there might be a beautiful ivory case of jewels on her dressing-table; when these pictures were in a moment darkened and blotted out.

They turned a corner, and met Mr. Lightwood.

He stopped as if he were petrified by the sight of Bella's husband, who in the same moment had changed colour.

"Mr. Lightwood and I have met before," he said.

"Met before, John?" Bella repeated in a tone of wonder. Mr. Lightwood told me he had never seen you."

"I did not then know that I had," said Lightwood, discomposed on her account. "I believed that I had only heard of—Mr. Rokesmith." With an emphasis on the name.

"When Mr. Lightwood saw me, my love," observed her husband, not avoiding his eye, but looking at him, "my name was Julius Handford."

Julius Handford! The name that Bella had so often seen in old newspapers, when she was an inmate of Mr. Boffin's house! Julius Handford, who had been publicly entreated to appear, and for intelligence of whom a reward had been publicly offered!

"I would have avoided mentioning it in your presence," said Lightwood to Bella, delicately; "but since your husband mentions it himself, I must confirm his strange admission. I saw him as Mr. Julius Handford, and I afterwards (unquestionably to his knowledge) took great pains to trace him out."

"Quite true. But it was not my object or my interest," said Rokesmith, quietly, "to be traced out."

Bella looked from the one to the other, in amazement.

"Mr. Lightwood," pursued her husband, "as chance has brought us face to face at last—which is not to be wondered at, for the wonder is, that, in spite of all my pains to the contrary, chance has not confronted us together sooner—I have only to remind you that you have been at my house, and to add that I have not changed my residence."

"Sir," returned Lightwood, with a meaning glance towards

Bella, "my position is a truly painful one. I hope that no complicity in a very dark transaction may attach to you, but you cannot fail to know that your own extraordinary conduct has laid you under suspicion."

"I know it has," was all the reply.

"My professional duty," said Lightwood, hesitating, with another glance towards Bella, "is greatly at variance with my personal inclination; but I doubt, Mr. Handford, or Mr. Rokesmith, whether I am justified in taking leave of you here, with your whole course unexplained."

Bella caught her husband by the hand.

"Don't be alarmed, my darling. Mr. Lightwood will find that he is quite justified in taking leave of me here. At all events," added Rokesmith, "he will find that I mean to take leave of him here."

"I think, sir," said Lightwood, "you can scarcely deny that when I came to your house on the occasion to which you have referred, you avoided me of a set purpose."

"Mr. Lightwood, I assure you I have no disposition to deny it, or intention to deny it. I should have continued to avoid you, in pursuance of the same set purpose, for a short time longer, if we had not met now. I am going straight home, and shall remain at home to-morrow until noon. Hereafter, I hope we may be better acquainted. Good-day."

Lightwood stood irresolute, but Bella's husband passed him in the steadiest manner, with Bella on his arm; and they went home without encountering any further remonstrance or molestation from any one.

When they had dined and were alone, John Rokesmith said to his wife, who had preserved her cheerfulness: "And you don't ask me, my dear, why I bore that name?"

"No, John love. I should dearly like to know, of course;" (which her anxious face confirmed;) "but I wait until you can tell me of your own free will. You asked me if I could have perfect faith in you, and I said yes, and I meant it."

It did not escape Bella's notice that he began to look triumphant. She wanted no strengthening in her firmness; but if she had had need of any, she would have derived it from his kindling face.

"You cannot have been prepared, my dearest, for such a discovery as that this mysterious Mr. Handford was identical with your husband?"

"No, John dear, of course not. But you told me to prepare to be tried, and I prepared myself."

He drew her to nestle closer to him, and told her it would soon be over, and the truth would soon appear. "And now," he went on, "lay stress, my dear on these words that I am going to add. I stand in no kind of peril, and I can by possibility be hurt at no one's hand."

"You are quite, quite sure of that, John dear?"

"Not a hair of my head! Moreover, I have done no wrong, and have injured no man. Shall I swear it?"

"No, John!" cried Bella, laying her hand upon his lips, with a proud look. "Never to me!"

"But circumstances," he went on, "—I can, and I will, disperse them in a moment—have surrounded me with one of the strangest suspicions ever known. You heard Mr. Lightwood speak of a dark transaction?"

"Yes, John."

"You are prepared to hear explicitly what he meant?"

"Yes, John."

"My life, he meant the murder of John Harmon, your allotted husband."

With a fast palpitating heart, Bella grasped him by the arm. "You cannot be suspected, John?"

"Dear love, I can be—for I am!"

There was silence between them, as she sat looking in his face, with the colour quite gone from her own face and lips. "How dare they!" she cried at length, in a burst of generous indignation. "My beloved husband, how dare they!"

He caught her in his arms as she opened hers, and held her to his heart. "Even knowing this, you can trust me, Bella?"

"I can trust you, John dear, with all my soul. If I could not trust you, I should fall dead at your feet."

The kindling triumph in his face was bright indeed, as he looked up and rapturously exclaimed, what had he done to deserve the blessing of this dear confiding creature's heart! Again she put her hand upon his lips, saying, "Hush!" and then told him, in her own little natural pathetic way, that if all the world were against him, she would be for him; that if all the world repudiated him, she would believe him; that if he were infamous in other eyes, he would be honored in hers; and that, under the worst unmerited suspicion, she

could devote her life to consoling him, and imparting her own faith in him to their little child.

A twilight calm of happiness then succeeding to their radiant noon, they remained at peace, until a strange voice in the room startled them both. The room being by that time dark, the voice said, "Don't let the lady be alarmed by my striking a light," and immediately a match rattled, and glimmered in a hand. The hand and the match and the voice were then seen by John Rokesmith to belong to Mr. Inspector, once meditatively active in this chronicle.

"I take the liberty," said Mr. Inspector, in a business-like manner, "to bring myself to the recollection of Mr. Julius Handford, who gave me his name and address down at our place a considerable time ago. Would the lady object to my lighting the pair of candles on the chimneypiece, to throw a further light upon the subject? No? Thank you, ma'am. Now, we look cheerful."

Mr. Inspector, in a dark-blue buttoned-up frock coat and pantaloons, presented a serviceable half pay, Royal Arms kind of appearance, as he applied his pocket handkerchief to his nose, and bowed to the lady.

"You favoured me, Mr. Handford," said Mr. Inspector, "by writing down your name and address, and I produce the piece of paper on which you wrote it. Comparing the same with the writing on the fly-leaf of this book on the table—and a sweet pretty volume it is—I find the writing of the entry, 'Mrs. John Rokesmith. From her husband on her birthday'—and very gratifying to the feelings such memorials are—to correspond exactly. Can I have a word with you?"

"Certainly. Here, if you please," was the reply.

"Why," retorted Mr. Inspector, again using his pocket handkerchief, "though there's nothing for the lady to be at all alarmed at, still, ladies are apt to take alarm at matters of business—being of that fragile sex that they're not accustomed to them when not of a strictly domestic character—and I do generally make it a rule to propose retirement from the presence of ladies, before entering upon business topics. Or perhaps," Mr. Inspector hinted, "if the lady was to step up stairs, and take a look at baby now!"

"Mrs. Rokesmith,"—her husband was beginning; when Mr. Inspector, regarding the words as an introduction, said,

"Happy, I am sure, to have the honor." And bowed, with gallantry.

"Mrs. Rokesmith," resumed her husband, "is satisfied that she can have no reason for being alarmed, whatever the business is."

"Really? Is that so?" said Mr. Inspector. "But it's a sex to live and learn from, and there's nothing a lady can't accomplish when she once fully gives her mind to it. It's the case with my own wife. Well, ma'am, this good gentleman of yours has given rise to a rather large amount of trouble which might have been avoided if he had come forward and explained himself. Well you see! He *didn't* come forward and explain himself. Consequently, now that we meet, him and me, you'll say—and say right—that there's nothing to be alarmed at, in my proposing to him to come forward—or, putting the same meaning in another form, to come along with me—and explain himself."

When Mr. Inspector put it in that other form, "to come along with me," there was a relishing roll in his voice, and his eye beamed with an official lustre.

"Do you propose to take me into custody?" inquired John Rokesmith, very coolly.

"Why argue?" returned Mr. Inspector in a comfortable sort of remonstrance; "ain't it enough that I propose that you shall come along with me?"

"For what reason?"

"Lord bless my soul and body!" returned Mr. Inspector, "I wonder at it in a man of your education. Why argue?"

"What do you charge against me?"

"I wonder at you before a lady," said Mr. Inspector, shaking his head reproachfully: "I wonder, brought up as you have been, you haven't a more delicate mind? I charge you, then, with being some way concerned in the Harmon Murder. I don't say whether before, or in, or after, the fact. I don't say whether with having some knowledge of it that hasn't come out."

"You don't surprise me. I foresaw your visit this afternoon."

"Don't?" said Mr. Inspector. "Why, why argue? It's my duty to inform you that whatever you say, will be used against you."

"I don't think it will."

"But I tell you it will," said Mr. Inspector. "Now, having received the caution, do you still say that you foresaw my visit this afternoon?"

"Yes. And I will say something more, if you will step with me into the next room."

With a reassuring kiss on the lips of the frightened Bella, her husband (to whom Mr. Inspector obligingly offered his arm), took up a candle, and withdrew with that gentleman. They were a full half-hour in conference. When they returned, Mr. Inspector looked considerably astonished.

"I have invited this worthy officer, my dear," said John, "to make a short excursion with me in which you shall be a sharer. He will take something to eat and drink, I dare say, on your invitation, while you are getting your bonnet on."

Mr. Inspector declined eating, but assented to the proposal of a glass of brandy and water. Mixing this cold, and pensively consuming it, he broke at intervals into such soliloquies as that he never did know such a move, that he never had been so gravelled, and that what a game was this to try the sort of stuff a man's opinion of himself was made of! Concurrently with these comments, he more than once burst out a laughing, with the half-enjoying and half-piqued air of a man, who had given up a good conundrum, after much guessing, and been told the answer. Bella was so timid of him, that she noted these things in a half-shrinking, half-perceptive way, and similarly noted that there was a great change in his manner towards John. That coming-along-with-him deportment was now lost in long musing looks at John and at herself, and sometimes in slow heavy rubs of his hand across his forehead, as if he were ironing out the creases which his deep pondering made there. He had had some coughing and whistling satellites secretly gravitating towards him about the premises, but they were now dismissed, and he eyed John as if he had meant to do him a public service, but had unfortunately been anticipated. Whether Bella might have noted anything more, if she had been less afraid of him, she could not determine; but it was all inexplicable to her, and not the faintest flash of the real state of the case broke in upon her mind. Mr. Inspector's increased notice of herself, and knowing way of raising his eyebrows when their eyes by any chance met, as if he put the question "Don't you see?" augmented her timidity, and, conse-

quently, her perplexity. For all these reasons, when he and she and John, at towards nine o'clock of a winter evening went to London, and began driving from London Bridge, among low-lying water-side wharves and docks and strange places, Bella was in the state of a dreamer; perfectly unable to account for her being there, perfectly unable to forecast what would happen next, or whither she was going, or why; certain of nothing in the immediate present, but that she confided in John, and that John seemed somehow to be getting more triumphant. But what a certainty was that!

They alighted at last at the corner of a court, where there was a building with a bright lamp and a wicket gate. Its orderly appearance was very unlike that of the surrounding neighbourhood, and was explained by the inscription POLICE STATION.

"We are not going in here, John?" said Bella, clinging to him.

"Yes, my dear; but of our own accord. We shall come out again as easily, never fear."

The whitewashed room was pure white as of old, the methodical book-keeping was in peaceful progress as of old, and some distant howler was banging against a cell door as of old. The sanctuary was not a permanent abiding-place, but a kind of criminal Pickford's. The lower passions and vices were regularly ticked off in the books, warehoused in the cells, carted away as per accompanying invoice, and left little mark upon it.

Mr. Inspector placed two chairs for his visitors, before the fire, and communed in a low voice with a brother of his order (also of a half-pay, and Royal Arms aspect), who, judged only by his occupation at the moment, might have been a writing-master, setting copies. Their conference done, Mr. Inspector returned to the fireplace, and, having observed that he would step round to the Fellowships and see how matters stood, went out. He soon came back again, saying, "Nothing could be better, for they're at supper with Miss Abbey in the bar;" and then they all three went out together.

Still, as in a dream, Bella found herself entering a snug old-fashioned public-house, and found herself smuggled into a little three-cornered room nearly opposite the bar of that establishment. Mr. Inspector achieved the smuggling of herself and John into this queer room, called COSY in an inscrip-

tion on the door, by entering in the narrow passage first in order, and suddenly turning round upon them with extended arms, as if they had been two sheep. The room was lighted for their reception.

"Now," said Mr. Inspector to John, turning the gas lower; "I'll mix with 'em in a casual way, and when I say Identification, perhaps you'll show yourself."

John nodded, and Mr. Inspector went alone to the half-door of the bar. From the dim doorway of *Cosy*, within which Bella and her husband stood, they could see a comfortable little party of three persons sitting at supper in the bar, and could hear everything that was said.

The three persons were Miss Abbey and two male guests. To whom collectively, Mr. Inspector remarked that the weather was getting sharp for the time of year.

"It need be sharp to suit your wits, sir," said Miss Abbey. "What have you got in hand now?"

"Thanking you for your compliment: not much, Miss Abbey," was Mr. Inspector's rejoinder.

"Who have you got in *Cosy*?" asked Miss Abbey.

"Only a gentleman and his wife, Miss."

"And who are they? If one may ask it without detriment to your deep plans in the interest of the honest public?" said Miss Abbey, proud of Mr. Inspector as an administrative genius.

"They are strangers in this part of the town, Miss Abbey. They are waiting till I shall want the gentleman to show himself somewhere, for half a moment."

"While they're waiting," said Miss Abbey, "couldn't you join us?"

Mr. Inspector immediately slipped into the bar, and sat down at the side of the half-door, with his back towards the passage, and directly facing the two guests. "I don't take my supper till later in the night," said he, "and therefore I won't disturb the compactness of the table. But I'll take a glass of flip, if that's flip in the jug in the fender?"

"That's flip," replied Miss Abbey, "and it's my making, and if even you can find out better, I shall be glad to know where." Filling him, with hospitable hands, a steaming tumbler, Miss Abbey replaced the jug by the fire; the company not having yet arrived at the flip stage of their supper, but being as yet skirmishing with strong ale.

"Ah—h!" cried Mr. Inspector. "That's the smack! There's not a Detective in the Force, Miss Abbey, that could find out better stuff than that."

"Glad to hear you say so," rejoined Miss Abbey. "You ought to know, if anybody does."

"Mr. Job Potterson," Mr. Inspector continued, "I drink your health. Mr. Jacob Kibble, I drink yours. Hope you have made a prosperous voyage home, gentlemen both."

Mr. Kibble, an unctuous broad man of few words and many mouthfuls, said, more briefly than pointedly, raising his ale to his lips: "Same to you." Mr. Job Potterson, a semi-seafaring man of obliging demeanour, said, "Thank you, sir."

"Lord bless my soul and body!" cried Mr. Inspector. "Talk of trades, Miss Abbey, and the way they set their marks on men" (a subject which nobody had approached); "who wouldn't know your brother to be a Steward! There's a bright and ready twinkle in his eye, there's a neatness in his action, there's a smartness in his figure, there's an air of reliability about him in case you wanted a basin, which points out the steward! And Mr. Kibble; ain't he Passenger, all over? While there's that mercantile cut upon him which would make you happy to give him credit for five hundred pound, don't you see the salt sea shining on him too?"

"You do, I dare say," returned Miss Abbey, "but *I* don't. And as for stewarding, I think it's time my brother gave that up, and took this House in hand on his sister's retiring. The House will go to pieces if he don't. I wouldn't sell it for any money that could be told out, to a person that I couldn't depend upon to be a Law to the Porters, as I have been."

"There you're right, Miss," said Mr. Inspector. "A better kept house is not known to our men. What do I say? Half so well a kept house is not known to our men. Show the Force the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, and the Force—to a constable—will show you a piece of perfection, Mr. Kibble."

That gentleman, with a very serious shake of his head, subscribed the article.

"And talk of Time slipping by you, as if it was an animal at rustic sports with its tail soaped," said Mr. Inspector (again, a subject which nobody had approached); "why, well you may. Well you may. How has it slipped by us, since the

time when Mr. Job Potterson here present, Mr. Jacob Kibble here present, and an Officer of the Force here present, first came together on a matter of Identification!"

Bella's husband stepped softly to the half-door of the bar, and stood there.

"How has Time slipped by us," Mr. Inspector went on slowly, with his eyes narrowly observant of the two guests, "since we three very men, at an Inquest in this very house—Mr. Kibble? Taken ill, sir?"

Mr. Kibble had staggered up, with his lower jaw dropped, catching Potterson by the shoulder, and pointing to the half-door. He now cried out: "Potterson! Look! Look there! Potterson started up, started back, and exclaimed: "Heaven defend us, what's that!" Bella's husband stepped back to Bella, took her in his arms (for she was terrified by the unintelligible terror of the two men), and shut the door of the little room. A hurry of voices succeeded, in which Mr. Inspector's voice was busiest; it gradually slackened and sank; and Mr. Inspector reappeared. "Sharp's the word, sir?" he said, looking in with a knowing wink. "We'll get your lady out at once." Immediately, Bella and her husband were under the stars, making their way back, alone, to the vehicle they had kept in waiting.

All this was most extraordinary, and Bella could make nothing of it but that John was in the right. How in the right, and how suspected of being in the wrong, she could not divine. Some vague idea that he had never really assumed the name of Handford, and that there was a remarkable likeness between him and that mysterious person, was her nearest approach to any definite explanation. But John was triumphant; that much was made apparent; and she could wait for the rest.

When John came home to dinner next day, he said, sitting down on the sofa by Bella and baby-Bella: "My dear, I have a piece of news to tell you. I have left the China House."

As he seemed to like having left it, Bella took it for granted that there was no misfortune in the case.

"In a word, my love," said John, "the China House is broken up and abolished. There is no such thing any more."

"Then, are you already in another House, John?"

"Yes, my darling. I am in another way of business, And I am rather better off."

The inexhaustible baby was instantly made to congratulate him, and to say, with appropriate action on the part of a very limp arm and a speckled fist: "Three cheers, ladies and gentlemen. Hoo—ray!"

"I am afraid, my life," said John, "that you have become very much attached to this cottage?"

"Afraid I have, John? Of course I have."

"The reason why I said afraid," returned John, "is, because we must move."

"O John!"

"Yes, my dear, we must move. We must have our headquarters in London now. In short, there's a dwelling-house rent-free, attached to my new position, and we must occupy it."

"That's a gain, John."

"Yes, my dear, it is undoubtedly a gain."

He gave her a very blythe look, and a very sly look. Which occasioned the inexhaustible baby to square at him with the speckled fists, and demand in a threatening manner what he meant?

"My love you said it was a gain, and I said it was a gain. A very innocent remark surely."

"I won't," said the inexhaustible baby, "—allow—you—to make—game—of—my—venerable—Ma." At each division administering a soft facer with one of the speckled fists.

John having stooped down to receive these punishing visitations, Bella asked him, would it be necessary to move soon? Why yes, indeed (said John), he did propose that they should move very soon. Taking the furniture with them, of course? (said Bella). Why, no (said John), the fact was, that the house was—in a sort of a kind of a way—furnished already.

The inexhaustible baby, hearing this, resumed the offensive, and said: "But there's no nursery for me, sir. What do you mean, marble-hearted parent?" To which the marble-hearted parent rejoined that there was a—sort of a kind of a—nursery, and it might be "made to do." "Made to do?" returned the Inexhaustible, administering more punishment, "what do you take me for?" And was then turned over on its back in Bella's lap, and smothered with kisses.

"But really, John dear," said Bella, flushed in quite a lovely manner by these exercises, "will the new house, just as it stands, do for baby? That's the question."

"I felt that to be the question," he returned, "and therefore

I arranged that you should come with me and look at it, to-morrow morning." Appointment made, accordingly, for Bella to go up with him to-morrow morning; John kissed; and Bella delighted.

When they reached London in pursuance of their little plan, they took coach and drove westward. Not only drove westward, but drove into that particular westward division, which Bella had seen last when she turned her face from Mr. Boffin's door. Not only drove into that particular division, but drove at last into that very street. Not only drove into that very street, but stopped at last at that very house.

"John dear!" cried Bella, looking out of window in a flutter. "Do you see where we are?"

"Yes, my love. The coachman's quite right."

The house-door was opened without any knocking or ringing, and John promptly helped her out. The servant who stood holding the door, asked no question of John, neither did he go before them or follow them as they went straight up-stairs. It was only her husband's encircling arm, urging her on, that prevented Bella from stopping at the foot of the staircase. As they ascended, it was seen to be tastefully ornamented with most beautiful flowers.

"O John!" said Bella, faintly. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing, my darling, nothing. Let us go on."

Going on a little higher, they came to a charming aviary, in which a number of tropical birds, more gorgeous in colour than the flowers, were flying about; and among those birds were gold and silver fish, and mosses, and water-lilies, and a fountain, and all manner of wonders.

"O my dear John!" said Bella. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing, my darling, nothing. Let us go on."

They went on, until they came to a door. As John put out his hand to open it, Bella caught his hand.

"I don't know what it means, but it's too much for me. Hold me, John, love."

John caught her up in his arm, and lightly dashed into the room with her.

Behold Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, beaming! Behold Mrs. Boffin clapping her hands in an ecstasy, running to Bella with tears of joy pouring down her comely face, and folding her to her breast, with the words: "My deary, deary, deary girl, that Noddy and me saw married and couldn't wish joy to, or so

much as speak to! My deary, deary, deary, wife of John and mother of his little child! My loving loving, bright bright, Pretty Pretty! Welcome to your house and home, my deary!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SHOWING HOW THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN HELPED TO SCATTER DUST.

IN all the first bewilderment of her wonder, the most bewilderingly wonderful thing to Bella was the shining countenance of Mr. Boffin. That his wife should be joyous, open-hearted, and genial, or that her face should express every quality that was large and trusting, and no quality that was little or mean, was accordant with Bella's experience. But, that he, with a perfectly beneficent air and a plump rosy face, should be standing there, looking at her and John, like some jovial good spirit, was marvellous. For, how had he looked when she last saw him in that very room (it was the room in which she had given him that piece of her mind at parting), and what had become of all those crooked lines of suspicion, avarice, and distrust, that twisted his visage then?

Mrs. Boffin seated Bella on the large ottoman, and seated herself beside her, and John her husband seated himself on the other side of her, and Mr. Boffin stood beaming at every one and everything he could see, with surpassing jollity and enjoyment. Mrs. Boffin was then taken with a laughing fit of clapping her hands, and clapping her knees, and rocking herself to and fro, and then with another laughing fit of embracing Bella, and rocking her to and fro—both fits, of considerable duration.

"Old lady, old lady," said Mr. Boffin, at length; "if you don't begin somebody else must."

"I'm a going to begin, Noddy, my dear," returned Mrs. Boffin. "Only it isn't easy for a person to know where to begin, when a person is in this state of delight and happiness. Bella, my dear. Tell me, who's this?"

"Who is this?" repeated Bella. "My husband."