

having set it before me, second to ruminant, and to become absent in his mind for some moments.

"How's the pie?" he said, rousing himself.

"It's a pudding," I made answer.

"Pudding!" he exclaimed. "Why, bless me, so it is! What!" looking at it nearer. "You don't mean to say it's a batter-pudding?"

"Yes, it is indeed."

"Why, a batter-pudding," he said, taking up a tablespoon, "is my favourite pudding. Ain't that lucky? Come on, little 'un, and let's see who'll get most."

The waiter certainly got most. He entreated me, more than once to come in and win, but what with his tablespoon to my teaspoon, his dispatch to my dispatch, and his appetite to my appetite, I was left far behind at the first mouthful, and had no chance with him. I never saw any one enjoy a pudding so much, I think; and he laughed, when it was all gone, as if his enjoyment of it lasted still.

Finding him so very friendly and companionable, I asked for the pen and ink and paper, to write to Peggotty. He not only brought it immediately, but was good enough to look over me while I wrote the letter. When I had finished it he asked me where I was going to school.

I said, "near London," which was all I knew.

"Oh, my eye!" he said, looking very low-spirited, "I am sorry for that."

"Why?" I asked him.

"Oh, Lord!" he said, shaking his head, "that's the school where they broke the boy's ribs — two ribs — a little boy he was. I should say he was — let me see — how old are you, about?"

I told him, between eight and nine.

"That's just his age," he said. "He was eight years and six months old when they broke his first rib; eight years and eight months old when they broke his second, and did for him."

I could not disguise from myself, or from the waiter, that this was an uncomfortable coincidence, and inquired how it was done. His answer was not cheering to my spirits, for it consisted of two dismal words, "With whopping."

The blowing of the coach-horn in the yard was a seasonable diversion, which made me get up and hesitatingly inquire, in the mingled pride and diffidence of having a purse (which I took out of my pocket), if there was anything to pay.

"There's a sheet of letter-paper," he returned.

"Did you ever buy a sheet of letter-paper?"

I could not remember that I ever had.

"It's dear," he said, "on account of the duty. Threepence. That's the way we're taxed in this country. There's nothing else except the waiter. Never mind the ink. I lose by that."

"What should you — what should I — how much ought I to — what would it be right to pay the waiter, if you please?" I stammered, blushing.

"If I hadn't a family, and that family hadn't the cowpock," said the waiter, "I wouldn't take a sixpence. If I didn't support a aged pairint, and a lovely sister" — here the waiter was greatly agitated — "I wouldn't take a farthing. If I had a good place, and was treated well here, I should beg acceptance of a trifle, instead of taking it. But I live on broken wittles — and I sleep on the coals" — here the waiter burst into tears.

I was very much concerned for his misfortunes, and felt that any recognition short of ninepence would be mere brutality and hardness of heart. Therefore I gave him one of my three bright shillings, which he received with much humility and veneration, and spun up with his thumb, directly afterwards, to try the goodness of.

It was a little disconcerting to me to find, when I was being helped up behind the coach, that I was supposed to have eaten all the dinner without any assistance. I discovered this from overhearing the lady in the bow-window say to the guard, "Take care of that child, George, or he'll burst!" and from observing that the women servants who were about the place came out to look and giggle at me. My unfortunate friend, the waiter, who had quite recovered his spirits, did not appear to be disturbed by this, but joined in the general admiration without being at all confused. If I had any doubt of him I suppose this half awakened it; but I am inclined to believe that with the simple confidence of a child, and the natural reliance of a child upon superior years, I had no serious mistrust of him on the whole, even then.

Throughout the rest of the journey I was made the subject of continual jokes between the coachman and the guard, but everything has an end, and so eventually I arrived at my new destination, and a fresh leaf of my life was begun.

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A young couple went to a minister's house to get married. After the ceremony the bridegroom drew the clergyman aside and said in a whisper, "I'm sorry I have no money to pay your fee, but if you'll take me down cellar I'll show you how to fix your gas meter so that it won't register."