

had paused for some time; "a very heedless, foolish fellow. I will take care that this is brought to a close without delay. Let us say no more upon the subject; it's a very painful one to me. Come to me in half an hour. I have strange things to tell you, my dear sir, and your uncle has appointed this afternoon for your waiting upon him with me."

"Waiting upon him! With you, sir!" cried Nicholas.

"Ay, with me," replied the old gentleman. "Return to me in half an hour, and I'll tell you more."

Nicholas waited upon him at the time mentioned, and then learnt all that had taken place on the previous day, and all that was known of the appointment Ralph had made with the brothers; which was for that night; and for the better understanding of which it will be requisite to return and follow Ralph's own footsteps from the house of the twin brothers. Therefore, we leave Nicholas somewhat reassured by the restored kindness of their manner towards him, and yet sensible that it was different from what it had been (though he scarcely knew in what respect): so he was full of uneasiness, uncertainty, and disquiet.

CHAPTER LXII

RALPH MAKES ONE LAST APPOINTMENT—AND KEEPS IT

CREEPING from the house, and slinking off like a thief; groping with his hands when first he got into the street, as if he were a blind man; and looking often over his shoulder while he hurried away, as though he were followed in imagination or reality by some one anxious to question or detain him; Ralph Nickleby left the city behind him, and took the road to his own home.

The night was dark, and a cold wind blew, driving the clouds furiously and fast before it. There was one black gloomy mass that seemed to follow him: not hurrying in the wild chase with the others, but lingering sullenly behind, and gliding darkly and stealthily on. He often looked back at this, and, more than once, stopped to let it pass over; but, somehow, when he went forward again, it was still behind him, coming mournfully and slowly up, like a shadowy funeral train.