

"Well, Havisham," said the Earl's harsh voice behind him. "What is it? It is evident something has happened. What was the extraordinary event, if I may ask?"

Mr. Havisham turned from the sofa, still rubbing his chin.

"It was bad news," he answered, "distressing news, my lord—the worst of news. I am sorry to be the bearer of it."

The Earl had been uneasy for some time during the evening, as he glanced at Mr. Havisham, and when he was uneasy he was always ill-tempered.

"Why do you look so at the boy!" he exclaimed irritably. "You have been looking at him all the evening as if—See here now, why should you look at the boy, Havisham, and hang over him like some bird of ill-omen! What has your news to do with Lord Fauntleroy?"

"My lord," said Mr. Havisham, "I will waste no words. My news has everything to do with Lord Fauntleroy. And if we are to believe it—it is not Lord Fauntleroy who lies sleeping before us, but only the son of Captain Errol. And the present Lord Fauntleroy is the son of your son Bevis, and is at this moment in a lodging house in London."

The Earl clutched the arms of his chair with both his hands until the veins stood out upon them; the veins stood out on his forehead too; his fierce old face was almost livid.

"What do you mean!" he cried out. "You are mad! Whose lie is this?"

"If it is a lie," answered Mr. Havisham, "it is painfully like the truth. A woman came to my chambers this morning. She said your son Bevis married her six years ago in London. She showed me her marriage certificate. They quarrelled a year after the marriage, and he paid her to keep away from him. She has a son five years old. She is an American of the lower classes,—an ignorant person,—and until lately she did not fully understand what her son could claim. She consulted a lawyer and found out that the boy was really Lord Fauntleroy and the heir to the earldom of Dorincourt; and she, of course, insists on his claims being acknowledged."

There was a movement of the curly head on the yellow satin cushion. A soft, long, sleepy sigh came from the parted lips, and the little boy stirred in his sleep, but not at all restlessly or uneasily. Not at all as if his slumber were disturbed by the fact that he was being proved a small imposter and that he was not Lord Fauntleroy at all and never would be the Earl of Dorincourt. He only turned his rosy face more on its side, as if to enable the old man who stared at it so solemnly to see it better.