

We're all suitable to our calling, we're well matched. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour.'

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night), with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor, and sat down in a flaunting manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a bold defiance at the other two.

'What odds then. What odds, Mrs Dilber.' said the woman. 'Every person has a right to take care of themselves. He always did.'

'That's true, indeed.' said the laundress. 'No man more so.'

'Why then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who's the wiser. We're not going to pick holes in each other's coats, I suppose.'

'No, indeed.' said Mrs Dilber and the man together. 'We should hope not.'

'Very well, then.' cried the woman. 'That's enough. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these. Not a dead man, I suppose.'

'No, indeed,' said Mrs Dilber, laughing.

‘If he wanted to keep them after he was dead, a wicked old screw,’ pursued the woman, ‘why wasn’t he natural in his lifetime. If he had been, he’d have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.’

‘It’s the truest word that ever was spoke,’ said Mrs Dilber. ‘It’s a judgment on him.’

‘I wish it was a little heavier judgment,’ replied the woman; ‘and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I’m not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it. We know pretty well that we were helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It’s no sin. Open the bundle, Joe.’

But the gallantry of her friends would not allow of this; and the man in faded black, mounting the breach first, produced his plunder. It was not extensive. A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. They were severally examined and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each, upon the wall, and added them up into a total when he found there was nothing more to come.