

## The Single Gentleman

The single gentleman renting the room refused to tell anyone his name. He never spoke to Mr Brass or Sally, came and went at unusual times, and sometimes slept all day. The only thing he seemed to be interested in was travelling puppet shows. For several weeks he went to all of the shows that passed through that area of London and he became friends with many of the puppeteers. He would often invite them back to his room for a drink after the show. One day he met the puppeteers Tommy Codlin and Mr Harris. While they were talking he asked them whether they had ever met a young girl called Nell and her grandfather. He had asked the same question to all the other puppeteers he had met.

'Yes! We saw them both,' cried Mr Harris, who then turned to his friend. 'See, Tommy – I told you someone would be looking for those two.'

'Do you know where they are now?' asked the single gentleman quickly.

'One of our friends said he saw them. They were travelling with a waxworks,' said Tommy.

'If you can find out exactly where they are,' the single gentleman told them, 'I'll give you both some money. Find out and then come back to me.'

Meanwhile Kit had been getting to know Mr and Mrs Garland, their son Abel, Barbara and Whisker the pony. Whisker was difficult at first, but the people were pleasant and Kit was happy in his new job. And soon Whisker grew to love him.

One morning a smartly dressed stranger arrived and asked if he could speak to Kit. The stranger was the single gentleman.

'I've been abroad for many years,' he told Kit. 'I've come back to London looking for something dear to my heart and I hoped to find it at The Old Curiosity Shop. But the shop is now closed and everyone has gone. I was told you might know where the old man who owned it is. Do you know?'

Over the next few minutes Kit told the single gentleman everything that had happened, ending his story with Nell and her grandfather's disappearance. Kit told him he had no idea where they were now. 'But there's a sign on the shop door,' Kit added. 'It says that all enquiries<sup>56</sup> should be made to Mr Sampson Brass, Mr Quilp's lawyer.'

'Yes, I know,' said the single gentleman. 'I saw the sign too and I've even rented a room in Mr Brass's house to try and find out more information. But I've learnt nothing.'

There was a moment's silence and then he said, 'I'll leave you now,' and he put a coin into Kit's hand. 'Please don't tell anyone about this meeting.'

Kit followed the single gentleman out into the street to say goodbye. And at that same moment Mr Richard Swiveller was walking down the same street and he saw Kit saying goodbye to his visitor. Richard was very surprised to see the single gentleman, Mr Brass's lodger, talking to Kit, the boy who used to work at The Old Curiosity Shop. Why on earth would these two be together? After the single gentleman had gone, Richard went over to Kit and asked him, but Kit seemed to know nothing about the man, not even his name.

The very next day a note came for Kit from the single gentleman. In the note he asked Kit to go and work for him for a while and help him to find Nell and her grandfather. He would pay Kit extra to do this. Mr Garland said that this would be all right, so Kit agreed to help the single gentleman. A carriage was sent to collect him straightaway.

He arrived at the single gentleman's lodgings and was welcomed inside. The man did not wait to tell Kit the