The little town of Great Winglebury is exactly forty-two miles and three-quarters from Hyde Park corner. It has a long, straggling, quiet High-street, with a great black and white clock at a small red Town-hall, half-way up--a market-place--a cage--an assembly-room--a church--a bridge--a chapel--a theatre--a library--an inn--a pump--and a Post-office. Tradition tells of a 'Little Winglebury,' down some cross-road about two miles off; and, as a square mass of dirty paper, supposed to have been originally intended for a letter, with certain tremulous characters inscribed thereon, in which a lively imagination might trace a remote resemblance to the word 'Little,' was once stuck up to be owned in the sunny window of the Great Winglebury Post-office, from which it only disappeared when it fell to pieces with dust and extreme old age, there would appear to be some foundation for the legend. Common belief is inclined to bestow the name upon a little hole at the end of a muddy lane about a couple of miles long, colonised by one wheelwright, four paupers, and a beer-shop; but, even this authority, slight as it is, must be regarded with extreme suspicion, inasmuch as the inhabitants of the hole aforesaid, concur in opining that it never had any name at all, from the earliest ages down to the present day.

The Winglebury Arms, in the centre of the High-street, opposite the small building with the big clock, is the principal inn of Great Winglebury--the commercial-inn, posting-house, and excise-office; the 'Blue' house at every election, and the judges' house at every assizes. It is the head-quarters of the Gentlemen's Whist Club of Winglebury Blues (so called in opposition to the Gentlemen's Whist Club of Winglebury Buffs, held at the other house, a little further down): and whenever a juggler, or wax-work man, or concert-giver, takes Great Winglebury in his circuit, it is immediately placarded all over the town that Mr. So-and-so, 'trusting to that liberal support which the inhabitants of Great Winglebury have long been so liberal in bestowing, has at a great expense engaged the elegant and commodious assembly-rooms, attached to the Winglebury Arms.' The house is a large one, with a red brick and stone front; a pretty spacious hall, ornamented with evergreen plants, terminates in a perspective view of the bar, and a glass case, in which are displayed a choice variety of delicacies ready for dressing, to catch the eye of a new-comer the moment he enters, and excite his appetite to the highest possible pitch. Opposite doors lead to the 'coffee' and 'commercial' rooms; and a great wide, rambling staircase,--three stairs and a landing--four stairs and another landing--one step and another landing--half-a-dozen stairs and another landing--and so on--conducts to galleries of bedrooms, and labyrinths of sitting-rooms, denominated 'private,' where you may enjoy yourself, as privately as you can in any place where some bewildered being walks into your room every five minutes, by mistake, and then walks out again, to open all the doors along the gallery until he finds his own.

Such is the Winglebury Arms, at this day, and such was the Winglebury Arms some time since--no matter when--two or three minutes before the arrival of the London stage. Four horses with cloths on--change for a coach--were standing quietly at the corner of the yard surrounded by a listless group of post-boys in shiny hats and smock-frocks, engaged in discussing the merits of the cattle; half a dozen ragged boys were standing a little apart, listening with evident interest to the conversation of these worthies; and a few loungers were collected round the horse-trough, awaiting the arrival of the coach.
The day was hot and sunny, the town in the zenith of its dulness, and with the exception of these few idlers, not a living creature was to be seen. Suddenly, the loud notes of a key-bugle broke the monotonous stillness of the street; in came the coach, rattling over the uneven paving with a noise startling enough to stop even the large-faced clock itself. Down got the outsiders, up went the windows in all directions, out came the waiters, up started the ostlers, and the loungers, and the post-boys, and the ragged boys, as if they were electrified--unstrapping, and unchaining, and unbuckling, and dragging willing horses out, and forcing reluctant horses in, and making a most exhilarating bustle. 'Lady inside, here!' said the guard. 'Please to alight, ma'am,' said the waiter. 'Private sitting-room?' interrogated the lady. 'Certainly, ma'am,' responded the chamber-maid. 'Nothing but these 'ere trunks, ma'am?' inquired the guard. 'Nothing more,' replied the lady. Up got the outsiders again, and the guard, and the coachman; off came the cloths, with a jerk; 'All right,' was the cry; and away they went. The loungers lingered a minute or two in the road, watching the coach until it turned the corner, and then loitered away one by one. The street was clear again, and the town, by contrast, quieter than ever.

'Lady in number twenty-five,' screamed the landlady.--'Thomas!'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Letter just been left for the gentleman in number nineteen. Boots at the Lion left it. No answer.'

'Letter for you, sir,' said Thomas, depositing the letter on number nineteen's table.

'For me?' said number nineteen, turning from the window, out of which he had been surveying the scene just described.

'Yes, sir,'--(waiters always speak in hints, and never utter complete sentences,)--'yes, sir,--Boots at the Lion, sir,--Bar, sir,--Missis said number nineteen, sir--Alexander Trott, Esq., sir?--Your card at the bar, sir, I think, sir?'

'My name IS Trott,' replied number nineteen, breaking the seal. 'You may go, waiter.' The waiter pulled down the window-blind, and then pulled it up again--for a regular waiter must do something before he leaves the room--adjusted the glasses on the side-board, brushed a place that was NOT dusty, rubbed his hands very hard, walked stealthily to the door, and evaporated.

There was, evidently, something in the contents of the letter, of a nature, if not wholly unexpected, certainly extremely disagreeable. Mr. Alexander Trott laid it down, and took it up again, and walked about the room on particular squares of the carpet, and even attempted, though unsuccessfully, to whistle an air. It wouldn't do. He threw himself into a chair, and read the following epistle aloud:-

'Blue Lion and Stomach-warmer,
'Great Winglebury.
'Wednesday Morning.

'Sir. Immediately on discovering your intentions, I left our counting-house, and followed you. I know the purport of your journey;--that journey shall never be completed.
'I have no friend here, just now, on whose secrecy I can rely. This shall be no obstacle to my revenge. Neither shall Emily Brown be exposed to the mercenary solicitations of a scoundrel, odious in her eyes, and contemptible in everybody else's: nor will I tamely submit to the clandestine attacks of a base umbrella-maker.

'Sir. From Great Winglebury church, a footpath leads through four meadows to a retired spot known to the townspeople as Stiffun's Acre.' (Mr. Trott shuddered.) 'I shall be waiting there alone, at twenty minutes before six o'clock to-morrow morning. Should I be disappointed in seeing you there, I will do myself the pleasure of calling with a horsewhip.

HORACE HUNTER.
'PS. There is a gunsmiths in the High-street; and they won't sell gunpowder after dark--you understand me.

'PPS. You had better not order your breakfast in the morning until you have met me. It may be an unnecessary expense.'

'Desperate-minded villain! I knew how it would be!' ejaculated the terrified Trott. 'I always told father, that once start me on this expedition, and Hunter would pursue me like the Wandering Jew. It's bad enough as it is, to marry with the old people's commands, and without the girl's consent; but what will Emily think of me, if I go down there breathless with running away from this infernal salamander? What SHALL I do? What CAN I do? If I go back to the city, I'm disgraced for ever--lose the girl--and, what's more, lose the money too. Even if I did go on to the Browns' by the coach, Hunter would be after me in a post-chaise; and if I go to this place, this Stiffun's Acre (another shudder), I'm as good as dead. I've seen him hit the man at the Pall-mall shooting-gallery, in the second button-hole of the waistcoat, five times out of every six, and when he didn't hit him there, he hit him in the head.' With this consolatory reminiscence Mr. Alexander Trott again ejaculated, 'What shall I do?'

Long and weary were his reflections, as, burying his face in his hand, he sat, ruminating on the best course to be pursued. His mental direction-post pointed to London. He thought of the 'governor's' anger, and the loss of the fortune which the paternal Brown had promised the paternal Trott his daughter should contribute to the coffers of his son. Then the words 'To Brown's' were legibly inscribed on the said direction-post, but Horace Hunter's denunciation rung in his ears;--last of all it bore, in red letters, the words, 'To Stiffun's Acre;' and then Mr. Alexander Trott decided on adopting a plan which he presently matured.

First and foremost, he despatched the under-boots to the Blue Lion and Stomach-warmer, with a gentlemanly note to Mr. Horace Hunter, intimating that he thirsted for his destruction and would do himself the pleasure of slaughtering him next morning, without fail. He then wrote another letter, and requested the attendance of the other boots--for they kept a pair. A modest knock at the room door was heard. 'Come in,' said Mr. Trott. A man thrust in a red head with one eye in it, and being again desired to 'come in,' brought in the body and the legs to which the head belonged, and a fur cap which belonged to the head.

'You are the upper-boots, I think?' inquired Mr. Trott.

'Yes, I am the upper-boots,' replied a voice from inside a velveteen case, with mother-of-pearl buttons--'that is, I'm the boots as b'longs to the house; the other man's my man, as goes errands and does odd jobs. Top-boots and half-boots, I calls us.'

'You're from London?' inquired Mr. Trott.

'Driv a cab once,' was the laconic reply.

'Why don't you drive it now?' asked Mr. Trott.

'Over-driv the cab, and driv over a 'ooman,' replied the top-boots, with brevity.

'Do you know the mayor's house?' inquired Mr. Trott.

'Rather,' replied the boots, significantly, as if he had some good reason to remember it.

'Do you think you could manage to leave a letter there?' interrogated Trott.

'Shouldn't wonder,' responded boots.

'But this letter,' said Trott, holding a deformed note with a paralytic direction in one hand, and five shillings in the other--'this letter is anonymous.'

'A--what?' interrupted the boots.
'Anonymous--he's not to know who it comes from.'

'Oh! I see,' responded the reg'lar, with a knowing wink, but without evincing the slightest disinclination to undertake
the charge--'I see--bit o' Sving, eh?' and his one eye wandered round the room, as if in quest of a dark lantern and
phosphorus-box. 'But, I say!' he continued, recalling the eye from its search, and bringing it to bear on Mr. Trott. 'I
say, he's a lawyer, our mayor, and insured in the County. If you've a spite agen him, you'd better not burn his house
down--blessed if I don't think it would be the greatest favour you could do him.' And he chuckled inwardly.

If Mr. Alexander Trott had been in any other situation, his first act would have been to kick the man down-stairs by
deputy; or, in other words, to ring the bell, and desire the landlord to take his boots off. He contented himself, however,
with doubling the fee and explaining that the letter merely related to a breach of the peace. The top-boots retired,
solemnly pledged to secrecy; and Mr. Alexander Trott sat down to a fried sole, maintenon cutlet, Madeira, and
sundries, with greater composure than he had experienced since the receipt of Horace Hunter's letter of defiance.

The lady who alighted from the London coach had no sooner been installed in number twenty-five, and made some
alteration in her travelling-dress, than she indited a note to Joseph Overton, esquire, solicitor, and mayor of Great
Winglebury, requesting his immediate attendance on private business of paramount importance--a summons which that
worthy functionary lost no time in obeying; for after sundry openings of his eyes, divers ejaculations of 'Bless me!' and
other manifestations of surprise, he took his broad-brimmed hat from its accustomed peg in his little front office, and
walked briskly down the High-street to the Winglebury Arms; through the hall and up the staircase of which
establishment he was ushered by the landlady, and a crowd of officious waiters, to the door of number twenty-five.

'Show the gentleman in,' said the stranger lady, in reply to the foremost waiter's announcement. The gentleman was
shown in accordingly.

The lady rose from the sofa; the mayor advanced a step from the door; and there they both paused, for a minute or two,
looking at one another as if by mutual consent. The mayor saw before him a buxom, richly-dressed female of about
forty; the lady looked upon a sleek man, about ten years older, in drab shorts and continuations, black coat, neckcloth,
and gloves.

'Miss Julia Manners!' exclaimed the mayor at length, 'you astonish me.'

'That's very unfair of you, Overton,' replied Miss Julia, 'for I have known you, long enough, not to be surprised at
anything you do, and you might extend equal courtesy to me.'

'But to run away--actually run away--with a young man!' remonstrated the mayor.

'You wouldn't have me actually run away with an old one, I presume?' was the cool rejoinder.

'And then to ask me--me--of all people in the world--a man of my age and appearance--mayor of the town--to promote
such a scheme!' pettishly ejaculated Joseph Overton; throwing himself into an arm-chair, and producing Miss Julia's
letter from his pocket, as if to corroborate the assertion that he HAD been asked.

'Now, Overton,' replied the lady, 'I want your assistance in this matter, and I must have it. In the lifetime of that poor
old dear, Mr. Cornberry, who--who--'

'Who was to have married you, and didn't, because he died first; and who left you his property unencumbered with the
addition of himself,' suggested the mayor.

'Well,' replied Miss Julia, reddening slightly, 'in the lifetime of the poor old dear, the property had the incumbrance of
your management; and all I will say of that, is, that I only wonder it didn't die of consumption instead of its master.
You helped yourself then:- help me now.'

Mr. Joseph Overton was a man of the world, and an attorney; and as certain indistinct recollections of an odd thousand
pounds or two, appropriated by mistake, passed across his mind he hemmed deprecatingly, smiled blandly, remained silent for a few seconds; and finally inquired, 'What do you wish me to do?'

'I'll tell you,' replied Miss Julia--'I'll tell you in three words. Dear Lord Peter--'

'That's the young man, I suppose--' interrupted the mayor.

'That's the young Nobleman,' replied the lady, with a great stress on the last word. 'Dear Lord Peter is considerably afraid of the resentment of his family; and we have therefore thought it better to make the match a stolen one. He left town, to avoid suspicion, on a visit to his friend, the Honourable Augustus Flair, whose seat, as you know, is about thirty miles from this, accompanied only by his favourite tiger. We arranged that I should come here alone in the London coach; and that he, leaving his tiger and cab behind him, should come on, and arrive here as soon as possible this afternoon.'

'Very well,' observed Joseph Overton, 'and then he can order the chaise, and you can go on to Gretna Green together, without requiring the presence or interference of a third party, can't you?'

'No,' replied Miss Julia. 'We have every reason to believe--dear Lord Peter not being considered very prudent or sagacious by his friends, and they having discovered his attachment to me--that, immediately on his absence being observed, pursuit will be made in this direction:- to elude which, and to prevent our being traced, I wish it to be understood in this house, that dear Lord Peter is slightly deranged, though perfectly harmless; and that I am, unknown to him, awaiting his arrival to convey him in a post-chaise to a private asylum--at Berwick, say. If I don't show myself much, I dare say I can manage to pass for his mother.'

The thought occurred to the mayor's mind that the lady might show herself a good deal without fear of detection; seeing that she was about double the age of her intended husband. He said nothing, however, and the lady proceeded.

'With the whole of this arrangement dear Lord Peter is acquainted; and all I want you to do, is, to make the delusion more complete by giving it the sanction of your influence in this place, and assigning this as a reason to the people of the house for my taking the young gentleman away. As it would not be consistent with the story that I should see him until after he has entered the chaise, I also wish you to communicate with him, and inform him that it is all going on well.'

'Has he arrived?' inquired Overton.

'I don't know,' replied the lady.

'Then how am I to know!' inquired the mayor. 'Of course he will not give his own name at the bar.'

'I begged him, immediately on his arrival, to write you a note,' replied Miss Manners; 'and to prevent the possibility of our project being discovered through its means, I desired him to write anonymously, and in mysterious terms, to acquaint you with the number of his room.'

'Bless me!' exclaimed the mayor, rising from his seat, and searching his pockets--'most extraordinary circumstance--he has arrived--mysterious note left at my house in a most mysterious manner, just before yours--didn't know what to make of it before, and certainly shouldn't have attended to it.--Oh! here it is.' And Joseph Overton pulled out of an inner coat-pocket the identical letter penned by Alexander Trott. 'Is this his lordship's hand?'

'Oh yes,' replied Julia; 'good, punctual creature! I have not seen it more than once or twice, but I know he writes very badly and very large. These dear, wild young noblemen, you know, Overton--'

'Ay, ay, I see,' replied the mayor.--'Horses and dogs, play and wine--grooms, actresses, and cigars--the stable, the green-room, the saloon, and the tavern; and the legislative assembly at last.'
Here's what he says,' pursued the mayor; "Sir,--A young gentleman in number nineteen at the Winglebury Arms, is bent on committing a rash act to-morrow morning at an early hour." (That's good--he means marrying.) "If you have any regard for the peace of this town, or the preservation of one--it may be two--human lives"--What the deuce does he mean by that?"

'That he's so anxious for the ceremony, he will expire if it's put off, and that I may possibly do the same,' replied the lady with great complacency.

'Oh! I see--not much fear of that;--well--"two human lives, you will cause him to be removed to-night." (He wants to start at once.) "Fear not to do this on your responsibility: for to-morrow the absolute necessity of the proceeding will be but too apparent. Remember: number nineteen. The name is Trott. No delay; for life and death depend upon your promptitude." Passionate language, certainly. Shall I see him?'

'Do,' replied Miss Julia; 'and entreat him to act his part well. I am half afraid of him. Tell him to be cautious.'

'I will,' said the mayor.

'Settle all the arrangements.'

'I will,' said the mayor again.

'And say I think the chaise had better be ordered for one o'clock.'

'Very well,' said the mayor once more; and, ruminating on the absurdity of the situation in which fate and old acquaintance had placed him, he desired a waiter to herald his approach to the temporary representative of number nineteen.

The announcement, 'Gentleman to speak with you, sir,' induced Mr. Trott to pause half-way in the glass of port, the contents of which he was in the act of imbibing at the moment; to rise from his chair; and retreat a few paces towards the window, as if to secure a retreat, in the event of the visitor assuming the form and appearance of Horace Hunter. One glance at Joseph Overton, however, quieted his apprehensions. He courteously motioned the stranger to a seat. The waiter, after a little jingling with the decanter and glasses, consented to leave the room; and Joseph Overton, placing the broad-brimmed hat on the chair next him, and bending his body gently forward, opened the business by saying in a very low and cautious tone,

'My lord--'

'Eh?' said Mr. Alexander Trott, in a loud key, with the vacant and mystified stare of a chilly somnambulist.

'Hush--hush!' said the cautious attorney: 'to be sure--quite right--no titles here--my name is Overton, sir.'

'Overton?'

'Yes: the mayor of this place--you sent me a letter with anonymous information, this afternoon.'

'I, sir?' exclaimed Trott with ill-dissembled surprise; for, coward as he was, he would willingly have repudiated the authorship of the letter in question. 'I, sir?'

'Yes, you, sir; did you not?' responded Overton, annoyed with what he supposed to be an extreme degree of unnecessary suspicion. 'Either this letter is yours, or it is not. If it be, we can converse securely upon the subject at once. If it be not, of course I have no more to say.'

'Stay, stay,' said Trott, 'it IS mine; I DID write it. What could I do, sir? I had no friend here.'

'To be sure, to be sure,' said the mayor, encouragingly, 'you could not have managed it better. Well, sir; it will be
necessary for you to leave here to-night in a post-chaise and four. And the harder the boys drive, the better. You are not safe from pursuit.'

'Bless me!' exclaimed Trott, in an agony of apprehension, 'can such things happen in a country like this? Such unrelenting and cold-blooded hostility!' He wiped off the concentrated essence of cowardice that was oozing fast down his forehead, and looked aghast at Joseph Overton.

'It certainly is a very hard case,' replied the mayor with a smile, 'that, in a free country, people can't marry whom they like, without being hunted down as if they were criminals. However, in the present instance the lady is willing, you know, and that's the main point, after all.'

'Lady willing,' repeated Trott, mechanically. 'How do you know the lady's willing?'

'Come, that's a good one,' said the mayor, benevolently tapping Mr. Trott on the arm with his broad-brimmed hat; 'I have known her, well, for a long time; and if anybody could entertain the remotest doubt on the subject, I assure you I have none, nor need you have.'

'Dear me!' said Mr. Trott, ruminating. 'This is VERY extraordinary!'

'Well, Lord Peter,' said the mayor, rising.

'Lord Peter?' repeated Mr. Trott.

'Oh--ah, I forgot. Mr. Trott, then--Trott--very good, ha! ha!-- Well, sir, the chaise shall be ready at half-past twelve.'

'And what is to become of me until then?' inquired Mr. Trott, anxiously. 'Wouldn't it save appearances, if I were placed under some restraint?'

'Ah!' replied Overton, 'very good thought--capital idea indeed. I'll send somebody up directly. And if you make a little resistance when we put you in the chaise it wouldn't be amiss--look as if you didn't want to be taken away, you know.'

'To be sure,' said Trott--'to be sure.'

'Well, my lord,' said Overton, in a low tone, 'until then, I wish your lordship a good evening.'

'Lord--lordship?' ejaculated Trott again, falling back a step or two, and gazing, in unutterable wonder, on the countenance of the mayor.

'Ha-ha! I see, my lord--practising the madman?--very good indeed-- very vacant look--capital, my lord, capital--good evening, Mr.-- Trott--ha! ha! ha!'

'That mayor's decidedly drunk,' soliloquised Mr. Trott, throwing himself back in his chair, in an attitude of reflection.

'He is a much cleverer fellow than I thought him, that young nobleman--he carries it off uncommonly well,' thought Overton, as he went his way to the bar, there to complete his arrangements. This was soon done. Every word of the story was implicitly believed, and the one-eyed boots was immediately instructed to repair to number nineteen, to act as custodian of the person of the supposed lunatic until half-past twelve o'clock. In pursuance of this direction, that somewhat eccentric gentleman armed himself with a walking-stick of gigantic dimensions, and repaired, with his usual equanimity of manner, to Mr. Trott's apartment, which he entered without any ceremony, and mounted guard in, by quietly depositing himself on a chair near the door, where he proceeded to beguile the time by whistling a popular air with great apparent satisfaction.

'What do you want here, you scoundrel?' exclaimed Mr. Alexander Trott, with a proper appearance of indignation at his detention.
The boots beat time with his head, as he looked gently round at Mr. Trott with a smile of pity, and whistled an adagio movement.

'Do you attend in this room by Mr. Overton's desire?' inquired Trott, rather astonished at the man's demeanour.

'Keep yourself to yourself, young feller,' calmly responded the boots, 'and don't say nothing to nobody.' And he whistled again.

'Now mind!' ejaculated Mr. Trott, anxious to keep up the farce of wishing with great earnestness to fight a duel if they'd let him. 'I protest against being kept here. I deny that I have any intention of fighting with anybody. But as it's useless contending with superior numbers, I shall sit quietly down.'

'You'd better,' observed the placid boots, shaking the large stick expressively.

'Under protest, however,' added Alexander Trott, seating himself with indignation in his face, but great content in his heart. 'Under protest.'

'Oh, certainly!' responded the boots; 'anything you please. If you're happy, I'm transported; only don't talk too much--it'll make you worse.'

'Make me worse?' exclaimed Trott, in unfeigned astonishment: 'the man's drunk!'  

'You'd better be quiet, young feller,' remarked the boots, going through a threatening piece of pantomime with the stick.

'Or mad!' said Mr. Trott, rather alarmed. 'Leave the room, sir, and tell them to send somebody else.'

'Won't do!' replied the boots.

'Leave the room!' shouted Trott, ringing the bell violently: for he began to be alarmed on a new score.

'Leave that 'ere bell alone, you wretched loo-nattic!' said the boots, suddenly forcing the unfortunate Trott back into his chair, and brandishing the stick aloft. 'Be quiet, you miserable object, and don't let everybody know there's a madman in the house.'

'He IS a madman! He IS a madman!' exclaimed the terrified Mr. Trott, gazing on the one eye of the red-headed boots with a look of abject horror.

'Madman!' replied the boots, 'dam'me, I think he IS a madman with a vengeance! Listen to me, you unfortunate. Ah! would you?' (a slight tap on the head with the large stick, as Mr. Trott made another move towards the bell-handle) 'I caught you there! did I?'

'Spare my life!' exclaimed Trott, raising his hands imploringly.

'I don't want your life,' replied the boots, disdainfully, 'though I think it 'ud be a charity if somebody took it.'

'No, no, it wouldn't,' interrupted poor Mr. Trott, hurriedly, 'no, no, it wouldn't! I--I'd rather keep it!'

'O werry well,' said the boots: 'that's a mere matter of taste-- ev'ry one to his liking. Hows'ever, all I've got to say is this here: You sit quietly down in that chair, and I'll sit hoppersite you here, and if you keep quiet and don't stir, I won't damage you; but, if you move hand or foot till half-past twelve o'clock, I shall alter the expression of your countenance so completely, that the next time you look in the glass you'll ask vether you're gone out of town, and ven you're likely to come back again. So sit down."

'I will--I will,' responded the victim of mistakes; and down sat Mr. Trott and down sat the boots too, exactly opposite
him, with the stick ready for immediate action in case of emergency.

Long and dreary were the hours that followed. The bell of Great Winglebury church had just struck ten, and two hours and a half would probably elapse before succour arrived.

For half an hour, the noise occasioned by shutting up the shops in the street beneath, betokened something like life in the town, and rendered Mr. Trott's situation a little less insupportable; but, when even these ceased, and nothing was heard beyond the occasional rattling of a post-chaise as it drove up the yard to change horses, and then drove away again, or the clattering of horses' hoofs in the stables behind, it became almost unbearable. The boots occasionally moved an inch or two, to knock superfluous bits of wax off the candles, which were burning low, but instantaneously resumed his former position; and as he remembered to have heard, somewhere or other, that the human eye had an unfailing effect in controlling mad people, he kept his solitary organ of vision constantly fixed on Mr. Alexander Trott. That unfortunate individual stared at his companion in his turn, until his features grew more and more indistinct--his hair gradually less red--and the room more misty and obscure. Mr. Alexander Trott fell into a sound sleep, from which he was awakened by a rumbling in the street, and a cry of 'Chaise-and-four for number twenty-five!' A bustle on the stairs succeeded; the room door was hastily thrown open; and Mr. Joseph Overton entered, followed by four stout waiters, and Mrs. Williamson, the stout landlady of the Winglebury Arms.

'Mr. Overton!' exclaimed Mr. Alexander Trott, jumping up in a frenzy. 'Look at this man, sir; consider the situation in which I have been placed for three hours past--the person you sent to guard me, sir, was a madman--a madman--a raging, ravaging, furious madman.'

'Bravo!' whispered Mr. Overton.

'Poor dear!' said the compassionate Mrs. Williamson, 'mad people always thinks other people's mad.'

'Poor dear!' ejaculated Mr. Alexander Trott. 'What the devil do you mean by poor dear! Are you the landlady of this house?'

'Yes, yes,' replied the stout old lady, 'don't exert yourself, there's a dear! Consider your health, now; do.'

'Exert myself!' shouted Mr. Alexander Trott; 'it's a mercy, ma'am, that I have any breath to exert myself with! I might have been assassinated three hours ago by that one-eyed monster with the oakum head. How dare you have a madman, ma'am--how dare you have a madman, to assault and terrify the visitors to your house?'

'I'll never have another,' said Mrs. Williamson, casting a look of reproach at the mayor.

'Capital, capital,' whispered Overton again, as he enveloped Mr. Alexander Trott in a thick travelling-cloak.

'Capital, sir!' exclaimed Trott, aloud; 'it's horrible. The very recollection makes me shudder. I'd rather fight four duels in three hours, if I survived the first three, than I'd sit for that time face to face with a madman.'

'Keep it up, my lord, as you go down-stairs,' whispered Overton, 'your bill is paid, and your portmanteau in the chaise.' And then he added aloud, 'Now, waiters, the gentleman's ready.'

At this signal, the waiters crowded round Mr. Alexander Trott. One took one arm; another, the other; a third, walked before with a candle; the fourth, behind with another candle; the boots and Mrs. Williamson brought up the rear; and down-stairs they went: Mr. Alexander Trott expressing alternately at the very top of his voice either his feigned reluctance to go, or his unfeigned indignation at being shut up with a madman.

Mr. Overton was waiting at the chaise-door, the boys were ready mounted, and a few ostlers and stable nondescripts were standing round to witness the departure of 'the mad gentleman.' Mr. Alexander Trott's foot was on the step, when he observed (which the dim light had prevented his doing before) a figure seated in the chaise, closely muffled up in a cloak like his own.
'Who's that?' he inquired of Overton, in a whisper.

'Hush, hush,' replied the mayor: 'the other party of course.'

'The other party!' exclaimed Trott, with an effort to retreat.

'Yes, yes; you'll soon find that out, before you go far, I should think--but make a noise, you'll excite suspicion if you whisper to me so much.'

'I won't go in this chaise!' shouted Mr. Alexander Trott, all his original fears recurring with tenfold violence. 'I shall be assassinated--I shall be--'

'Bravo, bravo,' whispered Overton. 'I'll push you in.'

'But I won't go,' exclaimed Mr. Trott. 'Help here, help! They're carrying me away against my will. This is a plot to murder me.'

'Poor dear!' said Mrs. Williamson again.

'Now, boys, put 'em along,' cried the mayor, pushing Trott in and slamming the door. 'Off with you, as quick as you can, and stop for nothing till you come to the next stage--all right!'

'Horses are paid, Tom,' screamed Mrs. Williamson; and away went the chaise, at the rate of fourteen miles an hour, with Mr. Alexander Trott and Miss Julia Manners carefully shut up in the inside.

Mr. Alexander Trott remained coiled up in one corner of the chaise, and his mysterious companion in the other, for the first two or three miles; Mr. Trott edging more and more into his corner, as he felt his companion gradually edging more and more from hers; and vainly endeavouring in the darkness to catch a glimpse of the furious face of the supposed Horace Hunter.

'We may speak now,' said his fellow-traveller, at length; 'the post-boys can neither see nor hear us.'

'That's not Hunter's voice!'--thought Alexander, astonished.

'Dear Lord Peter!' said Miss Julia, most winningly: putting her arm on Mr. Trott's shoulder. 'Dear Lord Peter. Not a word?'

'Why, it's a woman!' exclaimed Mr. Trott, in a low tone of excessive wonder.

'Ah! Whose voice is that?' said Julia; 'tis not Lord Peter's.'

'No,--it's mine,' replied Mr. Trott.

'Yours!' ejaculated Miss Julia Manners; 'a strange man! Gracious heaven! How came you here!'

'Whoever you are, you might have known that I came against my will, ma'am,' replied Alexander, 'for I made noise enough when I got in.'

'Do you come from Lord Peter?' inquired Miss Manners.

'Confound Lord Peter,' replied Trott pettishly. 'I don't know any Lord Peter. I never heard of him before to-night, when I've been Lord Peter'd by one and Lord Peter'd by another, till I verily believe I'm mad, or dreaming--'

'Whither are we going?' inquired the lady tragically.

'How should _I_ know, ma'am?' replied Trott with singular coolness; for the events of the evening had completely
hardened him.

'Stop stop!' cried the lady, letting down the front glasses of the chaise.

'Stay, my dear ma'am!' said Mr. Trott, pulling the glasses up again with one hand, and gently squeezing Miss Julia's waist with the other. There is some mistake here; give me till the end of this stage to explain my share of it. We must go so far; you cannot be set down here alone, at this hour of the night,'

The lady consented; the mistake was mutually explained. Mr. Trott was a young man, had highly promising whiskers, an undeniable tailor, and an insinuating address—he wanted nothing but valour, and who wants that with three thousand a-year? The lady had this, and more; she wanted a young husband, and the only course open to Mr. Trott to retrieve his disgrace was a rich wife. So, they came to the conclusion that it would be a pity to have all this trouble and expense for nothing; and that as they were so far on the road already, they had better go to Gretna Green, and marry each other; and they did so. And the very next preceding entry in the Blacksmith's book, was an entry of the marriage of Emily Brown with Horace Hunter. Mr. Hunter took his wife home, and begged pardon, and WAS pardoned; and Mr. Trott took HIS wife home, begged pardon too, and was pardoned also. And Lord Peter, who had been detained beyond his time by drinking champagne and riding a steeple-chase, went back to the Honourable Augustus Flair's, and drank more champagne, and rode another steeple-chase, and was thrown and killed. And Horace Hunter took great credit to himself for practising on the cowardice of Alexander Trott; and all these circumstances were discovered in time, and carefully noted down; and if you ever stop a week at the Winglebury Arms, they will give you just this account of The Great Winglebury Duel.

(The end)
Charles Dickens's short story: Great Winglebury Duel

By Charles Dickens