Constance, Tony, Mrs Hardcastle

MISS NEVILLE. (Aside.) Undone! undone! A letter to him from  
Hastings. I know the hand. If my aunt sees it, we are ruined for  
ever. I'll keep her employed a little if I can. (To MRS.  
HARDCASTLE.) But I have not told you, madam, of my cousin's smart  
answer just now to Mr. Marlow. We so laughed.--You must know,  
madam.--This way a little, for he must not hear us. [They confer.]  
  
TONY. (Still gazing.) A damned cramp piece of penmanship, as ever I  
saw in my life. I can read your print hand very well. But here are  
such handles, and shanks, and dashes, that one can scarce tell the head  
from the tail.--"To Anthony Lumpkin, Esquire." It's very odd, I can  
read the outside of my letters, where my own name is, well enough; but  
when I come to open it, it's all----buzz. That's hard, very hard; for  
the inside of the letter is always the cream of the correspondence.  
  
MRS. HARDCASTLE. Ha! ha! ha! Very well, very well. And so my son was  
too hard for the philosopher.  
  
MISS NEVILLE. Yes, madam; but you must hear the rest, madam. A  
little more this way, or he may hear us. You'll hear how he puzzled  
him again.  
  
MRS. HARDCASTLE. He seems strangely puzzled now himself, methinks.  
  
TONY. (Still gazing.) A damned up and down hand, as if it was  
disguised in liquor.--(Reading.) Dear Sir,--ay, that's that. Then  
there's an M, and a T, and an S, but whether the next be an izzard, or  
an R, confound me, I cannot tell.  
  
MRS. HARDCASTLE. What's that, my dear? Can I give you any  
assistance?  
  
MISS NEVILLE. Pray, aunt, let me read it. Nobody reads a cramp hand  
better than I. (Twitching the letter from him.) Do you know who it is  
from?  
  
TONY. Can't tell, except from Dick Ginger, the feeder.  
  
MISS NEVILLE. Ay, so it is. (Pretending to read.) Dear 'Squire,  
hoping that you're in health, as I am at this present. The gentlemen  
of the Shake-bag club has cut the gentlemen of Goose-green quite out of  
feather. The odds--um--odd battle--um--long fighting--um--here, here,  
it's all about cocks and fighting; it's of no consequence; here, put it  
up, put it up. (Thrusting the crumpled letter upon him.)  
  
TONY. But I tell you, miss, it's of all the consequence in the world.   
I would not lose the rest of it for a guinea. Here, mother, do you  
make it out. Of no consequence! (Giving MRS. HARDCASTLE the letter.)  
  
MRS. HARDCASTLE. How's this?--(Reads.) "Dear 'Squire, I'm now  
waiting for Miss Neville, with a post-chaise and pair, at the bottom of  
the garden, but I find my horses yet unable to perform the journey. I  
expect you'll assist us with a pair of fresh horses, as you promised.   
Dispatch is necessary, as the HAG (ay, the hag), your mother, will  
otherwise suspect us! Yours, Hastings." Grant me patience. I shall  
run distracted! My rage chokes me.  
  
MISS NEVILLE. I hope, madam, you'll suspend your resentment for a few  
moments, and not impute to me any impertinence, or sinister design,  
that belongs to another.  
  
MRS. HARDCASTLE. (Curtseying very low.) Fine spoken, madam, you are  
most miraculously polite and engaging, and quite the very pink of  
courtesy and circumspection, madam. (Changing her tone.) And you, you  
great ill-fashioned oaf, with scarce sense enough to keep your mouth  
shut: were you, too, joined against me? But I'll defeat all your plots  
in a moment. As for you, madam, since you have got a pair of fresh  
horses ready, it would be cruel to disappoint them. So, if you please,  
instead of running away with your spark, prepare, this very moment, to  
run off with ME. Your old aunt Pedigree will keep you secure, I'll  
warrant me. You too, sir, may mount your horse, and guard us upon the  
way. Here, Thomas, Roger, Diggory! I'll show you, that I wish you  
better than you do yourselves. [Exit.]  
  
MISS NEVILLE. So now I'm completely ruined.  
  
TONY. Ay, that's a sure thing.  
  
MISS NEVILLE. What better could be expected from being connected with  
such a stupid fool,--and after all the nods and signs I made him?  
  
TONY. By the laws, miss, it was your own cleverness, and not my  
stupidity, that did your business. You were so nice and so busy with  
your Shake-bags and Goose-greens, that I thought you could never be  
making believe.