DOCTOR MARIGOLD

A Christmas Story by Charles Dickens.

I am a Cheap Jack, and my own father's name was Willum Marigold. It was in his lifetime supposed by some that his name was William, but my own father always consistently said, "No, it was Willum." On which point I content myself with looking at the argument this way: If a man is not allowed to know his own name in a free country, how much is he allowed to know in a land of slavery? As to looking at the argument through the medium of the register, Willum Marigold come into the world before registers come up much—and went out of it too. They wouldn't have been greatly in his line, neither, if they had chanced to come up before him.

I was born on the queen's highway, but it was the king's at that time. A doctor was fetched to my own mother by my own father, when it took place on a common; and in consequence of his being a very kind gentleman, and accepting no fee but a tea tray, I was named Doctor, out of gratitude and compliment to him. There you have me—Doctor Marigold.

I am at present a middle-aged man of a broadish build, in cords, leggins and a sleeved waistcoat, the strings of which is always gone behind. Repair them how you will, they go like fiddle strings. You have been to the theater, and you have seen one of the wiolin players screw up his wiolin, after listening to it as if it had been whispering the secret to him that it feared it was out of order, and then you have heard it snap. That's as exactly similar to my waistcoat as a waistcoat and a wiolin can be like one another.

I am partial to a white hat, and I like a shawl round my neck wore loose and easy. Sitting down is my favorite posture. If I have a taste in point of personal jewelry it is mother-of-pearl buttons. There you have me again as large as life.

The doctor having accepted a tea tray, you'll guess that my father was a Cheap Jack before me. You are right. He was. It was a pretty tray. It represented a large lady going along a serpentining up-hill gravel walk to attend a little church. Two swans had likewise come astray with the same intentions. When I call her a large lady I don't mean in point of breadth, for there she fell below my views, but she more than made it up in height; her height and slimness was—in short the height of both.

I often saw that tray after I was the innocently smiling cause (or more likely screeching one) of the doctor's standing it upon a table against the wall in his consulting room. Whenever my own father and mother were in that part of the country I used to put my head (I have heard my own mother say it was flaxen curls at that time, though you wouldn't know an old hearth broom from it now till you come to the handle, and found it wasn't me) in at the doctor's door, and the doctor was always glad to see me, and said, "Aha, my brother practitioner! Come in, little M. D. How are your inclinations as to sixpence?"

You can't go on forever, you'll find, nor yet could my father nor yet my mother. If you don't go off as a whole when you are about due, you are liable to go off in part, and two to one your head's the part. Gradually my father went off his and my mother went off hers. It was in a harmless way, but it put out the family where I boarded them. The old couple, though retired, got to be wholly and solely devoted to the Cheap Jack business and were always selling the family off. Whenever the cloth was laid for dinner my father began rattling the plates and dishes, as we do in our line when we put up crockery for a bid, only he had lost the trick of it and mostly let 'em drop and broke 'em. As the old lady had been used to sit in the cart and hand the articles out one by one to the old gentleman on the footboard to sell, just in the same way she handed him every item of the family property, and they disposed of it in their own imagination from morning to night. At last the old gentleman, lying bedridden in the same room with the old lady, cries out in the old patter, after having been silent for two days and nights:

"Now here, my jolly companions, ...