

Chapter VI - Paul's Second Deprivation

Polly was beset by so many misgivings in the morning, that but for the incessant promptings of her black-eyed companion, she would have abandoned all thoughts of the expedition, and formally petitioned for leave to see number one hundred and forty-seven, under the awful shadow of Mr Dombey's roof. But Susan who was personally disposed in favour of the excursion, and who (like Tony Lumpkin), if she could bear the disappointments of other people with tolerable fortitude, could not abide to disappoint herself, threw so many ingenious doubts in the way of this second thought, and stimulated the original intention with so many ingenious arguments, that almost as soon as Mr Dombey's stately back was turned, and that gentleman was pursuing his daily road towards the City, his unconscious son was on his way to Staggs's Gardens.

This euphonious locality was situated in a suburb, known by the inhabitants of Staggs's Gardens by the name of Camberling Town; a designation which the Strangers' Map of London, as printed (with a view to pleasant and commodious reference) on pocket handkerchiefs, condenses, with some show of reason, into Camden Town. Hither the two nurses bent their steps, accompanied by their charges; Richards carrying Paul, of course, and Susan leading little Florence by the hand, and giving her such jerks and pokes from time to time, as she considered it wholesome to administer.

The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood. Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcasses of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar of flames came

issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.

But as yet, the neighbourhood was shy to own the Railroad. One or two bold speculators had projected streets; and one had built a little, but had stopped among the mud and ashes to consider farther of it. A bran-new Tavern, redolent of fresh mortar and size, and fronting nothing at all, had taken for its sign The Railway Arms; but that might be rash enterprise - and then it hoped to sell drink to the workmen. So, the Excavators' House of Call had sprung up from a beer-shop; and the old-established Ham and Beef Shop had become the Railway Eating House, with a roast leg of pork daily, through interested motives of a similar immediate and popular description. Lodging-house keepers were favourable in like manner; and for the like reasons were not to be trusted. The general belief was very slow. There were frowzy fields, and cow-houses, and dunghills, and dustheaps, and ditches, and gardens, and summer-houses, and carpet-beating grounds, at the very door of the Railway. Little tumuli of oyster shells in the oyster season, and of lobster shells in the lobster season, and of broken crockery and faded cabbage leaves in all seasons, encroached upon its high places. Posts, and rails, and old cautions to trespassers, and backs of mean houses, and patches of wretched vegetation, stared it out of countenance. Nothing was the better for it, or thought of being so. If the miserable waste ground lying near it could have laughed, it would have laughed it to scorn, like many of the miserable neighbours.

Staggs's Gardens was uncommonly incredulous. It was a little row of houses, with little squalid patches of ground before them, fenced off with old doors, barrel staves, scraps of tarpaulin, and dead bushes; with bottomless tin kettles and exhausted iron fenders, thrust into the gaps. Here, the Staggs's Gardeners trained scarlet beans, kept fowls and rabbits, erected rotten summer-houses (one was an old boat), dried clothes, and smoked pipes. Some were of opinion that Staggs's Gardens derived its name from a deceased capitalist, one Mr Staggs, who had built it for his delectation. Others, who had a natural taste for the country, held that it dated from those rural times when the antlered herd, under the familiar denomination of Staggses, had resorted to its shady precincts. Be this as it may, Staggs's Gardens was regarded by its population as a sacred grove not to be withered by Railroads; and so confident were they generally of its long outliving any such ridiculous inventions, that the master chimney-sweeper at the corner, who was understood to take the lead in the local politics of the Gardens, had publicly declared that on the occasion of the

Railroad opening, if ever it did open, two of his boys should ascend the flues of his dwelling, with instructions to hail the failure with derisive cheers from the chimney-pots.

To this unhallowed spot, the very name of which had hitherto been carefully concealed from Mr Dombey by his sister, was little Paul now borne by Fate and Richards

'That's my house, Susan,' said Polly, pointing it out.

'Is it, indeed, Mrs Richards?' said Susan, condescendingly.

'And there's my sister Jemima at the door, I do declare' cried Polly, 'with my own sweet precious baby in her arms!'

The sight added such an extensive pair of wings to Polly's impatience, that she set off down the Gardens at a run, and bouncing on Jemima, changed babies with her in a twinkling; to the unutterable astonishment of that young damsel, on whom the heir of the Dombey's seemed to have fallen from the clouds.

'Why, Polly!' cried Jemima. 'You! what a turn you have given me! who'd have thought it! come along in Polly! How well you do look to be sure! The children will go half wild to see you Polly, that they will.'

That they did, if one might judge from the noise they made, and the way in which they dashed at Polly and dragged her to a low chair in the chimney corner, where her own honest apple face became immediately the centre of a bunch of smaller pippins, all laying their rosy cheeks close to it, and all evidently the growth of the same tree. As to Polly, she was full as noisy and vehement as the children; and it was not until she was quite out of breath, and her hair was hanging all about her flushed face, and her new christening attire was very much dishevelled, that any pause took place in the confusion. Even then, the smallest Toodle but one remained in her lap, holding on tight with both arms round her neck; while the smallest Toodle but two mounted on the back of the chair, and made desperate efforts, with one leg in the air, to kiss her round the corner.

'Look! there's a pretty little lady come to see you,' said Polly; 'and see how quiet she is! what a beautiful little lady, ain't she?'

This reference to Florence, who had been standing by the door not unobservant of what passed, directed the attention of the younger branches towards her; and had likewise the happy effect of leading to the formal recognition of Miss Nipper, who was not quite free from a misgiving that she had been already slighted.

'Oh do come in and sit down a minute, Susan, please,' said Polly. 'This is my sister Jemima, this is. Jemima, I don't know what I should ever do with myself, if it wasn't for Susan Nipper; I shouldn't be here now but for her.'

'Oh do sit down, Miss Nipper, if you please,' quoth Jemima.

Susan took the extreme corner of a chair, with a stately and ceremonious aspect.

'I never was so glad to see anybody in all my life; now really I never was, Miss Nipper,' said Jemima.

Susan relaxing, took a little more of the chair, and smiled graciously.

'Do untie your bonnet-strings, and make yourself at home, Miss Nipper, please,' entreated Jemima. 'I am afraid it's a poorer place than you're used to; but you'll make allowances, I'm sure.'

The black-eyed was so softened by this deferential behaviour, that she caught up little Miss Toodle who was running past, and took her to Banbury Cross immediately.

'But where's my pretty boy?' said Polly. 'My poor fellow? I came all this way to see him in his new clothes.'

'Ah what a pity!' cried Jemima. 'He'll break his heart, when he hears his mother has been here. He's at school, Polly.'

'Gone already!'

'Yes. He went for the first time yesterday, for fear he should lose any learning. But it's half-holiday, Polly: if you could only stop till he comes home - you and Miss Nipper, leastways,' said Jemima, mindful in good time of the dignity of the black-eyed.

'And how does he look, Jemima, bless him!' faltered Polly.

'Well, really he don't look so bad as you'd suppose,' returned Jemima.

'Ah!' said Polly, with emotion, 'I knew his legs must be too short.'

'His legs is short,' returned Jemima; 'especially behind; but they'll get longer, Polly, every day.'

It was a slow, prospective kind of consolation; but the cheerfulness and good nature with which it was administered, gave it a value it did

not intrinsically possess. After a moment's silence, Polly asked, in a more sprightly manner:

'And where's Father, Jemima dear?' - for by that patriarchal appellation, Mr Toodle was generally known in the family.

'There again!' said Jemima. 'What a pity! Father took his dinner with him this morning, and isn't coming home till night. But he's always talking of you, Polly, and telling the children about you; and is the peaceablest, patientest, best-temperdest soul in the world, as he always was and will be!'

'Thankee, Jemima,' cried the simple Polly; delighted by the speech, and disappointed by the absence.

'Oh you needn't thank me, Polly,' said her sister, giving her a sounding kiss upon the cheek, and then dancing little Paul cheerfully. 'I say the same of you sometimes, and think it too.'

In spite of the double disappointment, it was impossible to regard in the light of a failure a visit which was greeted with such a reception; so the sisters talked hopefully about family matters, and about Biler, and about all his brothers and sisters: while the black-eyed, having performed several journeys to Banbury Cross and back, took sharp note of the furniture, the Dutch clock, the cupboard, the castle on the mantel-piece with red and green windows in it, susceptible of illumination by a candle-end within; and the pair of small black velvet kittens, each with a lady's reticule in its mouth; regarded by the Staggs's Gardeners as prodigies of imitative art. The conversation soon becoming general lest the black-eyed should go off at score and turn sarcastic, that young lady related to Jemima a summary of everything she knew concerning Mr Dombey, his prospects, family, pursuits, and character. Also an exact inventory of her personal wardrobe, and some account of her principal relations and friends. Having relieved her mind of these disclosures, she partook of shrimps and porter, and evinced a disposition to swear eternal friendship.

Little Florence herself was not behind-hand in improving the occasion; for, being conducted forth by the young Toodles to inspect some toadstools and other curiosities of the Gardens, she entered with them, heart and soul, on the formation of a temporary breakwater across a small green pool that had collected in a corner. She was still busily engaged in that labour, when sought and found by Susan; who, such was her sense of duty, even under the humanizing influence of shrimps, delivered a moral address to her (punctuated with thumps) on her degenerate nature, while washing her face and hands; and predicted that she would bring the grey hairs of her family in general, with sorrow to the grave. After some delay, occasioned by a pretty long

confidential interview above stairs on pecuniary subjects, between Polly and Jemima, an interchange of babies was again effected - for Polly had all this time retained her own child, and Jemima little Paul - and the visitors took leave.

But first the young Toodles, victims of a pious fraud, were deluded into repairing in a body to a chandler's shop in the neighbourhood, for the ostensible purpose of spending a penny; and when the coast was quite clear, Polly fled: Jemima calling after her that if they could only go round towards the City Road on their way back, they would be sure to meet little Biler coming from school.

'Do you think that we might make time to go a little round in that direction, Susan?' inquired Polly, when they halted to take breath.

'Why not, Mrs Richards?' returned Susan.

'It's getting on towards our dinner time you know,' said Polly.

But lunch had rendered her companion more than indifferent to this grave consideration, so she allowed no weight to it, and they resolved to go 'a little round.'

Now, it happened that poor Biler's life had been, since yesterday morning, rendered weary by the costume of the Charitable Grinders. The youth of the streets could not endure it. No young vagabond could be brought to bear its contemplation for a moment, without throwing himself upon the unoffending wearer, and doing him a mischief. His social existence had been more like that of an early Christian, than an innocent child of the nineteenth century. He had been stoned in the streets. He had been overthrown into gutters; bespattered with mud; violently flattened against posts. Entire strangers to his person had lifted his yellow cap off his head, and cast it to the winds. His legs had not only undergone verbal criticisms and revilings, but had been handled and pinched. That very morning, he had received a perfectly unsolicited black eye on his way to the Grinders' establishment, and had been punished for it by the master: a superannuated old Grinder of savage disposition, who had been appointed schoolmaster because he didn't know anything, and wasn't fit for anything, and for whose cruel cane all chubby little boys had a perfect fascination.'

Thus it fell out that Biler, on his way home, sought unfrequented paths; and slunk along by narrow passages and back streets, to avoid his tormentors. Being compelled to emerge into the main road, his ill fortune brought him at last where a small party of boys, headed by a ferocious young butcher, were lying in wait for any means of pleasurable excitement that might happen. These, finding a Charitable

Grinder in the midst of them - unaccountably delivered over, as it were, into their hands - set up a general yell and rushed upon him.

But it so fell out likewise, that, at the same time, Polly, looking hopelessly along the road before her, after a good hour's walk, had said it was no use going any further, when suddenly she saw this sight. She no sooner saw it than, uttering a hasty exclamation, and giving Master Dombey to the black-eyed, she started to the rescue of her unhappy little son.

Surprises, like misfortunes, rarely come alone. The astonished Susan Nipper and her two young charges were rescued by the bystanders from under the very wheels of a passing carriage before they knew what had happened; and at that moment (it was market day) a thundering alarm of 'Mad Bull!' was raised.

With a wild confusion before her, of people running up and down, and shouting, and wheels running over them, and boys fighting, and mad bulls coming up, and the nurse in the midst of all these dangers being torn to pieces, Florence screamed and ran. She ran till she was exhausted, urging Susan to do the same; and then, stopping and wringing her hands as she remembered they had left the other nurse behind, found, with a sensation of terror not to be described, that she was quite alone.

'Susan! Susan!' cried Florence, clapping her hands in the very ecstasy of her alarm. 'Oh, where are they? where are they?'

'Where are they?' said an old woman, coming hobbling across as fast as she could from the opposite side of the way. 'Why did you run away from 'em?'

'I was frightened,' answered Florence. 'I didn't know what I did. I thought they were with me. Where are they?'

The old woman took her by the wrist, and said, 'I'll show you.'

She was a very ugly old woman, with red rims round her eyes, and a mouth that mumbled and chattered of itself when she was not speaking. She was miserably dressed, and carried some skins over her arm. She seemed to have followed Florence some little way at all events, for she had lost her breath; and this made her uglier still, as she stood trying to regain it: working her shrivelled yellow face and throat into all sorts of contortions.

Florence was afraid of her, and looked, hesitating, up the street, of which she had almost reached the bottom. It was a solitary place -

more a back road than a street - and there was no one in it but herself and the old woman.

'You needn't be frightened now,' said the old woman, still holding her tight. 'Come along with me.'

'I - I don't know you. What's your name?' asked Florence.

'Mrs Brown,' said the old woman. 'Good Mrs Brown.'

'Are they near here?' asked Florence, beginning to be led away.

'Susan ain't far off,' said Good Mrs Brown; 'and the others are close to her.'

'Is anybody hurt?' cried Florence.

'Not a bit of it,' said Good Mrs Brown.

The child shed tears of delight on hearing this, and accompanied the old woman willingly; though she could not help glancing at her face as they went along - particularly at that industrious mouth - and wondering whether Bad Mrs Brown, if there were such a person, was at all like her.

They had not gone far, but had gone by some very uncomfortable places, such as brick-fields and tile-yards, when the old woman turned down a dirty lane, where the mud lay in deep black ruts in the middle of the road. She stopped before a shabby little house, as closely shut up as a house that was full of cracks and crevices could be. Opening the door with a key she took out of her bonnet, she pushed the child before her into a back room, where there was a great heap of rags of different colours lying on the floor; a heap of bones, and a heap of sifted dust or cinders; but there was no furniture at all, and the walls and ceiling were quite black.

The child became so terrified she was stricken speechless, and looked as though about to swoon.

'Now don't be a young mule,' said Good Mrs Brown, reviving her with a shake. 'I'm not a going to hurt you. Sit upon the rags.'

Florence obeyed her, holding out her folded hands, in mute supplication.

'I'm not a going to keep you, even, above an hour,' said Mrs Brown. 'D'ye understand what I say?'

The child answered with great difficulty, 'Yes.'

'Then,' said Good Mrs Brown, taking her own seat on the bones, 'don't vex me. If you don't, I tell you I won't hurt you. But if you do, I'll kill you. I could have you killed at any time - even if you was in your own bed at home. Now let's know who you are, and what you are, and all about it.'

The old woman's threats and promises; the dread of giving her offence; and the habit, unusual to a child, but almost natural to Florence now, of being quiet, and repressing what she felt, and feared, and hoped; enabled her to do this bidding, and to tell her little history, or what she knew of it. Mrs Brown listened attentively, until she had finished.

'So your name's Dombey, eh?' said Mrs Brown.

'I want that pretty frock, Miss Dombey,' said Good Mrs Brown, 'and that little bonnet, and a petticoat or two, and anything else you can spare. Come! Take 'em off.'

Florence obeyed, as fast as her trembling hands would allow; keeping, all the while, a frightened eye on Mrs Brown. When she had divested herself of all the articles of apparel mentioned by that lady, Mrs B. examined them at leisure, and seemed tolerably well satisfied with their quality and value.

'Humph!' she said, running her eyes over the child's slight figure, 'I don't see anything else - except the shoes. I must have the shoes, Miss Dombey.'

Poor little Florence took them off with equal alacrity, only too glad to have any more means of conciliation about her. The old woman then produced some wretched substitutes from the bottom of the heap of rags, which she turned up for that purpose; together with a girl's cloak, quite worn out and very old; and the crushed remains of a bonnet that had probably been picked up from some ditch or dunghill. In this dainty raiment, she instructed Florence to dress herself; and as such preparation seemed a prelude to her release, the child complied with increased readiness, if possible.

In hurriedly putting on the bonnet, if that may be called a bonnet which was more like a pad to carry loads on, she caught it in her hair which grew luxuriantly, and could not immediately disentangle it. Good Mrs Brown whipped out a large pair of scissors, and fell into an unaccountable state of excitement.

'Why couldn't you let me be!' said Mrs Brown, 'when I was contented? You little fool!'

'I beg your pardon. I don't know what I have done,' panted Florence. 'I couldn't help it.'

'Couldn't help it!' cried Mrs Brown. 'How do you expect I can help it? Why, Lord!' said the old woman, ruffling her curls with a furious pleasure, 'anybody but me would have had 'em off, first of all.' Florence was so relieved to find that it was only her hair and not her head which Mrs Brown coveted, that she offered no resistance or entreaty, and merely raised her mild eyes towards the face of that good soul.

'If I hadn't once had a gal of my own - beyond seas now- that was proud of her hair,' said Mrs Brown, 'I'd have had every lock of it. She's far away, she's far away! Oho! Oho!'

Mrs Brown's was not a melodious cry, but, accompanied with a wild tossing up of her lean arms, it was full of passionate grief, and thrilled to the heart of Florence, whom it frightened more than ever. It had its part, perhaps, in saving her curls; for Mrs Brown, after hovering about her with the scissors for some moments, like a new kind of butterfly, bade her hide them under the bonnet and let no trace of them escape to tempt her. Having accomplished this victory over herself, Mrs Brown resumed her seat on the bones, and smoked a very short black pipe, mowing and mumbling all the time, as if she were eating the stem.

When the pipe was smoked out, she gave the child a rabbit-skin to carry, that she might appear the more like her ordinary companion, and told her that she was now going to lead her to a public street whence she could inquire her way to her friends. But she cautioned her, with threats of summary and deadly vengeance in case of disobedience, not to talk to strangers, nor to repair to her own home (which may have been too near for Mrs Brown's convenience), but to her father's office in the City; also to wait at the street corner where she would be left, until the clock struck three. These directions Mrs Brown enforced with assurances that there would be potent eyes and ears in her employment cognizant of all she did; and these directions Florence promised faithfully and earnestly to observe.

At length, Mrs Brown, issuing forth, conducted her changed and ragged little friend through a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and alleys, which emerged, after a long time, upon a stable yard, with a gateway at the end, whence the roar of a great thoroughfare made itself audible. Pointing out this gateway, and informing Florence that when the clocks struck three she was to go to the left, Mrs Brown, after making a parting grasp at her hair which seemed involuntary and quite beyond her own control, told her she knew what to do, and bade her go and do it: remembering that she was watched.

With a lighter heart, but still sore afraid, Florence felt herself released, and tripped off to the corner. When she reached it, she looked back and saw the head of Good Mrs Brown peeping out of the low wooden passage, where she had issued her parting injunctions; likewise the fist of Good Mrs Brown shaking towards her. But though she often looked back afterwards - every minute, at least, in her nervous recollection of the old woman - she could not see her again.

Florence remained there, looking at the bustle in the street, and more and more bewildered by it; and in the meanwhile the clocks appeared to have made up their minds never to strike three any more. At last the steeples rang out three o'clock; there was one close by, so she couldn't be mistaken; and - after often looking over her shoulder, and often going a little way, and as often coming back again, lest the all-powerful spies of Mrs Brown should take offence - she hurried off, as fast as she could in her slipshod shoes, holding the rabbit-skin tight in her hand.

All she knew of her father's offices was that they belonged to Dombey and Son, and that that was a great power belonging to the City. So she could only ask the way to Dombey and Son's in the City; and as she generally made inquiry of children - being afraid to ask grown people - she got very little satisfaction indeed. But by dint of asking her way to the City after a while, and dropping the rest of her inquiry for the present, she really did advance, by slow degrees, towards the heart of that great region which is governed by the terrible Lord Mayor.

Tired of walking, repulsed and pushed about, stunned by the noise and confusion, anxious for her brother and the nurses, terrified by what she had undergone, and the prospect of encountering her angry father in such an altered state; perplexed and frightened alike by what had passed, and what was passing, and what was yet before her; Florence went upon her weary way with tearful eyes, and once or twice could not help stopping to ease her bursting heart by crying bitterly. But few people noticed her at those times, in the garb she wore: or if they did, believed that she was tutored to excite compassion, and passed on. Florence, too, called to her aid all the firmness and self-reliance of a character that her sad experience had prematurely formed and tried: and keeping the end she had in view steadily before her, steadily pursued it.

It was full two hours later in the afternoon than when she had started on this strange adventure, when, escaping from the clash and clangour of a narrow street full of carts and waggons, she peeped into a kind of wharf or landing-place upon the river-side, where there were a great many packages, casks, and boxes, strewn about; a large pair of wooden scales; and a little wooden house on wheels, outside of

which, looking at the neighbouring masts and boats, a stout man stood whistling, with his pen behind his ear, and his hands in his pockets, as if his day's work were nearly done.

'Now then! 'said this man, happening to turn round. 'We haven't got anything for you, little girl. Be off!'

'If you please, is this the City?' asked the trembling daughter of the Dombey's.

'Ah! It's the City. You know that well enough, I daresay. Be off! We haven't got anything for you.'

'I don't want anything, thank you,' was the timid answer. 'Except to know the way to Dombey and Son's.'

The man who had been strolling carelessly towards her, seemed surprised by this reply, and looking attentively in her face, rejoined:

'Why, what can you want with Dombey and Son's?'

'To know the way there, if you please.'

The man looked at her yet more curiously, and rubbed the back of his head so hard in his wonderment that he knocked his own hat off.

'Joe!' he called to another man - a labourer- as he picked it up and put it on again.

'Joe it is!' said Joe.

'Where's that young spark of Dombey's who's been watching the shipment of them goods?'

'Just gone, by t'other gate,' said Joe.

'Call him back a minute.'

Joe ran up an archway, bawling as he went, and very soon returned with a blithe-looking boy.

'You're Dombey's jockey, ain't you?' said the first man.

'I'm in Dombey's House, Mr Clark,' returned the boy.

'Look'ye here, then,' said Mr Clark.

Obedient to the indication of Mr Clark's hand, the boy approached towards Florence, wondering, as well he might, what he had to do with her. But she, who had heard what passed, and who, besides the relief of so suddenly considering herself safe at her journey's end, felt reassured beyond all measure by his lively youthful face and manner, ran eagerly up to him, leaving one of the slipshod shoes upon the ground and caught his hand in both of hers.

'I am lost, if you please!' said Florence.

'Lost!' cried the boy.

'Yes, I was lost this morning, a long way from here - and I have had my clothes taken away, since - and I am not dressed in my own now - and my name is Florence Dombey, my little brother's only sister - and, oh dear, dear, take care of me, if you please!' sobbed Florence, giving full vent to the childish feelings she had so long suppressed, and bursting into tears. At the same time her miserable bonnet falling off, her hair came tumbling down about her face: moving to speechless admiration and commiseration, young Walter, nephew of Solomon Gills, Ships' Instrument-maker in general.

Mr Clark stood rapt in amazement: observing under his breath, I never saw such a start on this wharf before. Walter picked up the shoe, and put it on the little foot as the Prince in the story might have fitted Cinderella's slipper on. He hung the rabbit-skin over his left arm; gave the right to Florence; and felt, not to say like Richard Whittington - that is a tame comparison - but like Saint George of England, with the dragon lying dead before him.

'Don't cry, Miss Dombey,' said Walter, in a transport of enthusiasm.

'What a wonderful thing for me that I am here! You are as safe now as if you were guarded by a whole boat's crew of picked men from a man-of-war. Oh, don't cry.'

'I won't cry any more,' said Florence. 'I am only crying for joy.'

'Crying for joy!' thought Walter, 'and I'm the cause of it! Come along, Miss Dombey. There's the other shoe off now! Take mine, Miss Dombey.'

'No, no, no,' said Florence, checking him in the act of impetuously pulling off his own. 'These do better. These do very well.'

'Why, to be sure,' said Walter, glancing at her foot, 'mine are a mile too large. What am I thinking about! You never could walk in mine! Come along, Miss Dombey. Let me see the villain who will dare molest you now.'

So Walter, looking immensely fierce, led off Florence, looking very happy; and they went arm-in-arm along the streets, perfectly indifferent to any astonishment that their appearance might or did excite by the way.

It was growing dark and foggy, and beginning to rain too; but they cared nothing for this: being both wholly absorbed in the late adventures of Florence, which she related with the innocent good faith and confidence of her years, while Walter listened as if, far from the mud and grease of Thames Street, they were rambling alone among the broad leaves and tall trees of some desert island in the tropics - as he very likely fancied, for the time, they were.

'Have we far to go?' asked Florence at last, liting up her eyes to her companion's face.

'Ah! By-the-bye,' said Walter, stopping, 'let me see; where are we? Oh! I know. But the offices are shut up now, Miss Dombey. There's nobody there. Mr Dombey has gone home long ago. I suppose we must go home too? or, stay. Suppose I take you to my Uncle's, where I live - it's very near here - and go to your house in a coach to tell them you are safe, and bring you back some clothes. Won't that be best?'

'I think so,' answered Florence. 'Don't you? What do you think?'

As they stood deliberating in the street, a man passed them, who glanced quickly at Walter as he went by, as if he recognised him; but seeming to correct that first impression, he passed on without stopping.

'Why, I think it's Mr Carker,' said Walter. 'Carker in our House. Not Carker our Manager, Miss Dombey - the other Carker; the Junior - Halloa! Mr Carker!'

'Is that Walter Gay?' said the other, stopping and returning. 'I couldn't believe it, with such a strange companion.'

As he stood near a lamp, listening with surprise to Walter's hurried explanation, he presented a remarkable contrast to the two youthful figures arm-in-arm before him. He was not old, but his hair was white; his body was bent, or bowed as if by the weight of some great trouble: and there were deep lines in his worn and melancholy face. The fire of his eyes, the expression of his features, the very voice in

which he spoke, were all subdued and quenched, as if the spirit within him lay in ashes. He was respectably, though very plainly dressed, in black; but his clothes, moulded to the general character of his figure, seemed to shrink and abase themselves upon him, and to join in the sorrowful solicitation which the whole man from head to foot expressed, to be left unnoticed, and alone in his humility.

And yet his interest in youth and hopefulness was not extinguished with the other embers of his soul, for he watched the boy's earnest countenance as he spoke with unusual sympathy, though with an inexplicable show of trouble and compassion, which escaped into his looks, however hard he strove to hold it prisoner. When Walter, in conclusion, put to him the question he had put to Florence, he still stood glancing at him with the same expression, as if he had read some fate upon his face, mournfully at variance with its present brightness.

'What do you advise, Mr Carker?' said Walter, smiling. 'You always give me good advice, you know, when you do speak to me. That's not often, though.'

'I think your own idea is the best,' he answered: looking from Florence to Walter, and back again.

'Mr Carker,' said Walter, brightening with a generous thought, 'Come! Here's a chance for you. Go you to Mr Dombey's, and be the messenger of good news. It may do you some good, Sir. I'll remain at home. You shall go.'

'I!' returned the other.

'Yes. Why not, Mr Carker?' said the boy.

He merely shook him by the hand in answer; he seemed in a manner ashamed and afraid even to do that; and bidding him good-night, and advising him to make haste, turned away.

'Come, Miss Dombey,' said Walter, looking after him as they turned away also, 'we'll go to my Uncle's as quick as we can. Did you ever hear Mr Dombey speak of Mr Carker the Junior, Miss Florence?'

'No,' returned the child, mildly, 'I don't often hear Papa speak.'

'Ah! true! more shame for him,' thought Walter. After a minute's pause, during which he had been looking down upon the gentle patient little face moving on at his side, he said, 'The strangest man, Mr Carker the Junior is, Miss Florence, that ever you heard of. If you could understand what an extraordinary interest he takes in me, and

yet how he shuns me and avoids me; and what a low place he holds in our office, and how he is never advanced, and never complains, though year after year he sees young men passed over his head, and though his brother (younger than he is), is our head Manager, you would be as much puzzled about him as I am.'

As Florence could hardly be expected to understand much about it, Walter bestirred himself with his accustomed boyish animation and restlessness to change the subject; and one of the unfortunate shoes coming off again opportunely, proposed to carry Florence to his uncle's in his arms. Florence, though very tired, laughingly declined the proposal, lest he should let her fall; and as they were already near the wooden Midshipman, and as Walter went on to cite various precedents, from shipwrecks and other moving accidents, where younger boys than he had triumphantly rescued and carried off older girls than Florence, they were still in full conversation about it when they arrived at the Instrument-maker's door.

'Holloa, Uncle Sol!' cried Walter, bursting into the shop, and speaking incoherently and out of breath, from that time forth, for the rest of the evening. 'Here's a wonderful adventure! Here's Mr Dombey's daughter lost in the streets, and robbed of her clothes by an old witch of a woman - found by me - brought home to our parlour to rest - look here!'

'Good Heaven!' said Uncle Sol, starting back against his favourite compass-case. 'It can't be! Well, I - '

'No, nor anybody else,' said Walter, anticipating the rest. 'Nobody would, nobody could, you know. Here! just help me lift the little sofa near the fire, will you, Uncle Sol - take care of the plates - cut some dinner for her, will you, Uncle - throw those shoes under the grate. Miss Florence - put your feet on the fender to dry - how damp they are - here's an adventure, Uncle, eh? - God bless my soul, how hot I am!'

Solomon Gills was quite as hot, by sympathy, and in excessive bewilderment. He patted Florence's head, pressed her to eat, pressed her to drink, rubbed the soles of her feet with his pocket-handkerchief heated at the fire, followed his locomotive nephew with his eyes, and ears, and had no clear perception of anything except that he was being constantly knocked against and tumbled over by that excited young gentleman, as he darted about the room attempting to accomplish twenty things at once, and doing nothing at all.

'Here, wait a minute, Uncle,' he continued, catching up a candle, 'till I run upstairs, and get another jacket on, and then I'll be off. I say, Uncle, isn't this an adventure?'

'My dear boy,' said Solomon, who, with his spectacles on his forehead and the great chronometer in his pocket, was incessantly oscillating between Florence on the sofa, and his nephew in all parts of the parlour, 'it's the most extraordinary - '

'No, but do, Uncle, please - do, Miss Florence - dinner, you know, Uncle.'

'Yes, yes, yes,' cried Solomon, cutting instantly into a leg of mutton, as if he were catering for a giant. 'I'll take care of her, Wally! I understand. Pretty dear! Famished, of course. You go and get ready. Lord bless me! Sir Richard Whittington thrice Lord Mayor of London.'

Walter was not very long in mounting to his lofty garret and descending from it, but in the meantime Florence, overcome by fatigue, had sunk into a doze before the fire. The short interval of quiet, though only a few minutes in duration, enabled Solomon Gills so far to collect his wits as to make some little arrangements for her comfort, and to darken the room, and to screen her from the blaze. Thus, when the boy returned, she was sleeping peacefully.

'That's capital!' he whispered, giving Solomon such a hug that it squeezed a new expression into his face. 'Now I'm off. I'll just take a crust of bread with me, for I'm very hungry - and don't wake her, Uncle Sol.'

'No, no,' said Solomon. 'Pretty child.'

'Pretty, indeed!' cried Walter. 'I never saw such a face, Uncle Sol. Now I'm off.'

'That's right,' said Solomon, greatly relieved.

'I say, Uncle Sol,' cried Walter, putting his face in at the door.

'Here he is again,' said Solomon.

'How does she look now?'

'Quite happy,' said Solomon.

'That's famous! now I'm off.'

'I hope you are,' said Solomon to himself.

'I say, Uncle Sol,' cried Walter, reappearing at the door.

'Here he is again!' said Solomon.

'We met Mr Carker the Junior in the street, queerer than ever. He bade me good-bye, but came behind us here - there's an odd thing! - for when we reached the shop door, I looked round, and saw him going quietly away, like a servant who had seen me home, or a faithful dog. How does she look now, Uncle?'

'Pretty much the same as before, Wally,' replied Uncle Sol.

'That's right. Now I am off!'

And this time he really was: and Solomon Gills, with no appetite for dinner, sat on the opposite side of the fire, watching Florence in her slumber, building a great many airy castles of the most fantastic architecture; and looking, in the dim shade, and in the close vicinity of all the instruments, like a magician disguised in a Welsh wig and a suit of coffee colour, who held the child in an enchanted sleep.

In the meantime, Walter proceeded towards Mr Dombey's house at a pace seldom achieved by a hack horse from the stand; and yet with his head out of window every two or three minutes, in impatient remonstrance with the driver. Arriving at his journey's end, he leaped out, and breathlessly announcing his errand to the servant, followed him straight into the library, where there was a great confusion of tongues, and where Mr Dombey, his sister, and Miss Tox, Richards, and Nipper, were all congregated together.

'Oh! I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Walter, rushing up to him, 'but I'm happy to say it's all right, Sir. Miss Dombey's found!'

The boy with his open face, and flowing hair, and sparkling eyes, panting with pleasure and excitement, was wonderfully opposed to Mr Dombey, as he sat confronting him in his library chair.

'I told you, Louisa, that she would certainly be found,' said Mr Dombey, looking slightly over his shoulder at that lady, who wept in company with Miss Tox. 'Let the servants know that no further steps are necessary. This boy who brings the information, is young Gay, from the office. How was my daughter found, Sir? I know how she was lost.' Here he looked majestically at Richards. 'But how was she found? Who found her?'

'Why, I believe I found Miss Dombey, Sir,' said Walter modestly, 'at least I don't know that I can claim the merit of having exactly found her, Sir, but I was the fortunate instrument of - '

'What do you mean, Sir,' interrupted Mr Dombey, regarding the boy's evident pride and pleasure in his share of the transaction with an

instinctive dislike, 'by not having exactly found my daughter, and by being a fortunate instrument? Be plain and coherent, if you please.'

It was quite out of Walter's power to be coherent; but he rendered himself as explanatory as he could, in his breathless state, and stated why he had come alone.

'You hear this, girl?' said Mr Dombey sternly to the black-eyed. 'Take what is necessary, and return immediately with this young man to fetch Miss Florence home. Gay, you will be rewarded to-morrow.'

'Oh! thank you, Sir,' said Walter. 'You are very kind. I'm sure I was not thinking of any reward, Sir.'

'You are a boy,' said Mr Dombey, suddenly and almost fiercely; 'and what you think of, or affect to think of, is of little consequence. You have done well, Sir. Don't undo it. Louisa, please to give the lad some wine.'

Mr Dombey's glance followed Walter Gay with sharp disfavour, as he left the room under the pilotage of Mrs Chick; and it may be that his mind's eye followed him with no greater relish, as he rode back to his Uncle's with Miss Susan Nipper.

There they found that Florence, much refreshed by sleep, had dined, and greatly improved the acquaintance of Solomon Gills, with whom she was on terms of perfect confidence and ease. The black-eyed (who had cried so much that she might now be called the red-eyed, and who was very silent and depressed) caught her in her arms without a word of contradiction or reproach, and made a very hysterical meeting of it. Then converting the parlour, for the nonce, into a private tiring room, she dressed her, with great care, in proper clothes; and presently led her forth, as like a Dombey as her natural disqualifications admitted of her being made.

'Good-night!' said Florence, running up to Solomon. 'You have been very good to me.'

Old Sol was quite delighted, and kissed her like her grand-father.

'Good-night, Walter! Good-bye!' said Florence.

'Good-bye!' said Walter, giving both his hands.

'I'll never forget you,' pursued Florence. 'No! indeed I never will. Good-bye, Walter!' In the innocence of her grateful heart, the child lifted up her face to his. Walter, bending down his own, raised it again, all red and burning; and looked at Uncle Sol, quite sheepishly.

'Where's Walter?' 'Good-night, Walter!' 'Good-bye, Walter!' 'Shake hands once more, Walter!' This was still Florence's cry, after she was shut up with her little maid, in the coach. And when the coach at length moved off, Walter on the door-step gaily turned the waving of her handkerchief, while the wooden Midshipman behind him seemed, like himself, intent upon that coach alone, excluding all the other passing coaches from his observation.

In good time Mr Dombey's mansion was gained again, and again there was a noise of tongues in the library. Again, too, the coach was ordered to wait - 'for Mrs Richards,' one of Susan's fellow-servants ominously whispered, as she passed with Florence.

The entrance of the lost child made a slight sensation, but not much. Mr Dombey, who had never found her, kissed her once upon the forehead, and cautioned her not to run away again, or wander anywhere with treacherous attendants. Mrs Chick stopped in her lamentations on the corruption of human nature, even when beckoned to the paths of virtue by a Charitable Grinder; and received her with a welcome something short of the reception due to none but perfect Dombey's. Miss Tox regulated her feelings by the models before her. Richards, the culprit Richards, alone poured out her heart in broken words of welcome, and bowed herself over the little wandering head as if she really loved it.

'Ah, Richards!' said Mrs Chick, with a sigh. 'It would have been much more satisfactory to those who wish to think well of their fellow creatures, and much more becoming in you, if you had shown some proper feeling, in time, for the little child that is now going to be prematurely deprived of its natural nourishment.'

'Cut off,' said Miss Tox, in a plaintive whisper, 'from one common fountain!'

'If it was ungrateful case,' said Mrs Chick, solemnly, 'and I had your reflections, Richards, I should feel as if the Charitable Grinders' dress would blight my child, and the education choke him.'

For the matter of that - but Mrs Chick didn't know it - he had been pretty well blighted by the dress already; and as to the education, even its retributive effect might be produced in time, for it was a storm of sobs and blows.

'Louisa!' said Mr Dombey. 'It is not necessary to prolong these observations. The woman is discharged and paid. You leave this house, Richards, for taking my son - my son,' said Mr Dombey, emphatically repeating these two words, 'into haunts and into society which are not to be thought of without a shudder. As to the accident

which befel Miss Florence this morning, I regard that as, in one great sense, a happy and fortunate circumstance; inasmuch as, but for that occurrence, I never could have known - and from your own lips too - of what you had been guilty. I think, Louisa, the other nurse, the young person,' here Miss Nipper sobbed aloud, 'being so much younger, and necessarily influenced by Paul's nurse, may remain. Have the goodness to direct that this woman's coach is paid to' - Mr Dombey stopped and winced - 'to Staggs's Gardens.'

Polly moved towards the door, with Florence holding to her dress, and crying to her in the most pathetic manner not to go away. It was a dagger in the haughty father's heart, an arrow in his brain, to see how the flesh and blood he could not disown clung to this obscure stranger, and he sitting by. Not that he cared to whom his daughter turned, or from whom turned away. The swift sharp agony struck through him, as he thought of what his son might do.

His son cried lustily that night, at all events. Sooth to say, poor Paul had better reason for his tears than sons of that age often have, for he had lost his second mother - his first, so far as he knew - by a stroke as sudden as that natural affliction which had darkened the beginning of his life. At the same blow, his sister too, who cried herself to sleep so mournfully, had lost as good and true a friend. But that is quite beside the question. Let us waste no words about it.