Chapter VIX - In which the Wooden Midshipman gets into Trouble

That spice of romance and love of the marvellous, of which there was a pretty strong infusion in the nature of young Walter Gay, and which the guardianship of his Uncle, old Solomon Gills, had not very much weakened by the waters of stern practical experience, was the occasion of his attaching an uncommon and delightful interest to the adventure of Florence with Good Mrs Brown. He pampered and cherished it in his memory, especially that part of it with which he had been associated: until it became the spoiled child of his fancy, and took its own way, and did what it liked with it.

The recollection of those incidents, and his own share in them, may have been made the more captivating, perhaps, by the weekly dreamings of old Sol and Captain Cuttle on Sundays. Hardly a Sunday passed, without mysterious references being made by one or other of those worthy chums to Richard Whittington; and the latter gentleman had even gone so far as to purchase a ballad of considerable antiquity, that had long fluttered among many others, chiefly expressive of maritime sentiments, on a dead wall in the Commercial Road: which poetical performance set forth the courtship and nuptials of a promising young coal-whipper with a certain 'lovely Peg,' the accomplished daughter of the master and part-owner of a Newcastle collier. In this stirring legend, Captain Cuttle descried a profound metaphysical bearing on the case of Walter and Florence; and it excited him so much, that on very festive occasions, as birthdays and a few other non-Dominical holidays, he would roar through the whole song in the little back parlour; making an amazing shake on the word Pe-e-eg, with which every verse concluded, in compliment to the heroine of the piece.

But a frank, free-spirited, open-hearted boy, is not much given to analysing the nature of his own feelings, however strong their hold upon him: and Walter would have found it difficult to decide this point. He had a great affection for the wharf where he had encountered Florence, and for the streets (albeit not enchanting in themselves) by which they had come home. The shoes that had so often tumbled off by the way, he preserved in his own room; and, sitting in the little back parlour of an evening, he had drawn a whole gallery of fancy portraits of Good Mrs Brown. It may be that he became a little smarter in his dress after that memorable occasion; and he certainly liked in his leisure time to walk towards that quarter of the town where Mr Dombey's house was situated, on the vague chance of passing little Florence in the street. But the sentiment of all this was as boyish and innocent as could be. Florence was very pretty, and it is pleasant to admire a pretty face. Florence was defenceless and weak, and it was a proud thought that he had been able to render her any protection and assistance. Florence was the most grateful

little creature in the world, and it was delightful to see her bright gratitude beaming in her face. Florence was neglected and coldly looked upon, and his breast was full of youthful interest for the slighted child in her dull, stately home.

Thus it came about that, perhaps some half-a-dozen times in the course of the year, Walter pulled off his hat to Florence in the street, and Florence would stop to shake hands. Mrs Wickam (who, with a characteristic alteration of his name, invariably spoke of him as 'Young Graves') was so well used to this, knowing the story of their acquaintance, that she took no heed of it at all. Miss Nipper, on the other hand, rather looked out for these occasions: her sensitive young heart being secretly propitiated by Walter's good looks, and inclining to the belief that its sentiments were responded to.

In this way, Walter, so far from forgetting or losing sight of his acquaintance with Florence, only remembered it better and better. As to its adventurous beginning, and all those little circumstances which gave it a distinctive character and relish, he took them into account, more as a pleasant story very agreeable to his imagination, and not to be dismissed from it, than as a part of any matter of fact with which he was concerned. They set off Florence very much, to his fancy; but not himself. Sometimes he thought (and then he walked very fast) what a grand thing it would have been for him to have been going to sea on the day after that first meeting, and to have gone, and to have done wonders there, and to have stopped away a long time, and to have come back an Admiral of all the colours of the dolphin, or at least a Post-Captain with epaulettes of insupportable brightness, and have married Florence (then a beautiful young woman) in spite of Mr Dombey's teeth, cravat, and watch-chain, and borne her away to the blue shores of somewhere or other, triumphantly. But these flights of fancy seldom burnished the brass plate of Dombey and Son's Offices into a tablet of golden hope, or shed a brilliant lustre on their dirty skylights; and when the Captain and Uncle Sol talked about Richard Whittington and masters' daughters, Walter felt that he understood his true position at Dombey and Son's, much better than they did.

So it was that he went on doing what he had to do from day to day, in a cheerful, pains-taking, merry spirit; and saw through the sanguine complexion of Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle; and yet entertained a thousand indistinct and visionary fancies of his own, to which theirs were work-a-day probabilities. Such was his condition at the Pipchin period, when he looked a little older than of yore, but not much; and was the same light-footed, light-hearted, light-headed lad, as when he charged into the parlour at the head of Uncle Sol and the imaginary boarders, and lighted him to bring up the Madeira.

'Uncle Sol,' said Walter, 'I don't think you're well. You haven't eaten any breakfast. I shall bring a doctor to you, if you go on like this.'

'He can't give me what I want, my boy,' said Uncle Sol. 'At least he is in good practice if he can - and then he wouldn't.'

'What is it, Uncle? Customers?'

'Ay,' returned Solomon, with a sigh. 'Customers would do.'

'Confound it, Uncle!' said Walter, putting down his breakfast cup with a clatter, and striking his hand on the table: 'when I see the people going up and down the street in shoals all day, and passing and re-passing the shop every minute, by scores, I feel half tempted to rush out, collar somebody, bring him in, and make him buy fifty pounds' worth of instruments for ready money. What are you looking in at the door for? - ' continued Walter, apostrophizing an old gentleman with a powdered head (inaudibly to him of course), who was staring at a ship's telescope with all his might and main. 'That's no use. I could do that. Come in and buy it!'

The old gentleman, however, having satiated his curiosity, walked calmly away.

'There he goes!' said Walter. 'That's the way with 'em all. But, Uncle - I say, Uncle Sol' - for the old man was meditating and had not responded to his first appeal. 'Don't be cast down. Don't be out of spirits, Uncle. When orders do come, they'll come in such a crowd, you won't be able to execute 'em.'

'I shall be past executing 'em, whenever they come, my boy,' returned Solomon Gills. 'They'll never come to this shop again, till I am out of t.'

'I say, Uncle! You musn't really, you know!' urged Walter. 'Don't!'

Old Sol endeavoured to assume a cheery look, and smiled across the little table at him as pleasantly as he could.

'There's nothing more than usual the matter; is there, Uncle?' said Walter, leaning his elbows on the tea tray, and bending over, to speak the more confidentially and kindly. 'Be open with me, Uncle, if there is, and tell me all about it.'

'No, no, no,' returned Old Sol. 'More than usual? No, no. What should there be the matter more than usual?'

Walter answered with an incredulous shake of his head. 'That's what I want to know,' he said, 'and you ask me! I'll tell you what, Uncle, when I see you like this, I am quite sorry that I live with you.'

Old Sol opened his eyes involuntarily.

'Yes. Though nobody ever was happier than I am and always have been with you, I am quite sorry that I live with you, when I see you with anything in your mind.'

'I am a little dull at such times, I know,' observed Solomon, meekly rubbing his hands.

'What I mean, Uncle Sol,' pursued Walter, bending over a little more to pat him on the shoulder, 'is, that then I feel you ought to have, sitting here and pouring out the tea instead of me, a nice little dumpling of a wife, you know, - a comfortable, capital, cosy old lady, who was just a match for you, and knew how to manage you, and keep you in good heart. Here am I, as loving a nephew as ever was (I am sure I ought to be!) but I am only a nephew, and I can't be such a companion to you when you're low and out of sorts as she would have made herself, years ago, though I'm sure I'd give any money if I could cheer you up. And so I say, when I see you with anything on your mind, that I feel quite sorry you haven't got somebody better about you than a blundering young rough-and-tough boy like me, who has got the will to console you, Uncle, but hasn't got the way - hasn't got the way,' repeated Walter, reaching over further yet, to shake his Uncle by the hand.

'Wally, my dear boy,' said Solomon, 'if the cosy little old lady had taken her place in this parlour five and forty years ago, I never could have been fonder of her than I am of you.'

'I know that, Uncle Sol,' returned Walter. 'Lord bless you, I know that. But you wouldn't have had the whole weight of any uncomfortable secrets if she had been with you, because she would have known how to relieve you of 'em, and I don't.'

'Yes, yes, you do,' returned the Instrument-maker.

'Well then, what's the matter, Uncle Sol?' said Walter, coaxingly. 'Come! What's the matter?'

Solomon Gills persisted that there was nothing the matter; and maintained it so resolutely, that his nephew had no resource but to make a very indifferent imitation of believing him.

'All I can say is, Uncle Sol, that if there is - '

'But there isn't,' said Solomon.

'Very well,, said Walter. 'Then I've no more to say; and that's lucky, for my time's up for going to business. I shall look in by-and-by when I'm out, to see how you get on, Uncle. And mind, Uncle! I'll never believe you again, and never tell you anything more about Mr Carker the Junior, if I find out that you have been deceiving me!'

Solomon Gills laughingly defied him to find out anything of the kind; and Walter, revolving in his thoughts all sorts of impracticable ways of making fortunes and placing the wooden Midshipman in a position of independence, betook himself to the offices of Dombey and Son with a heavier countenance than he usually carried there.

There lived in those days, round the corner - in Bishopsgate Street Without - one Brogley, sworn broker and appraiser, who kept a shop where every description of second-hand furniture was exhibited in the most uncomfortable aspect, and under circumstances and in combinations the most completely foreign to its purpose. Dozens of chairs hooked on to washing-stands, which with difficulty poised themselves on the shoulders of sideboards, which in their turn stood upon the wrong side of dining-tables, gymnastic with their legs upward on the tops of other dining-tables, were among its most reasonable arrangements. A banquet array of dish-covers, wine-glasses, and decanters was generally to be seen, spread forth upon the bosom of a four-post bedstead, for the entertainment of such genial company as half-a-dozen pokers, and a hall lamp. A set of window curtains with no windows belonging to them, would be seen gracefully draping a barricade of chests of drawers, loaded with little jars from chemists' shops; while a homeless hearthrug severed from its natural companion the fireside, braved the shrewd east wind in its adversity, and trembled in melancholy accord with the shrill complainings of a cabinet piano, wasting away, a string a day, and faintly resounding to the noises of the street in its jangling and distracted brain. Of motionless clocks that never stirred a finger, and seemed as incapable of being successfully wound up, as the pecuniary affairs of their former owners, there was always great choice in Mr Brogley's shop; and various looking-glasses, accidentally placed at compound interest of reflection and refraction, presented to the eye an eternal perspective of bankruptcy and ruin.

Mr Brogley himself was a moist-eyed, pink-complexioned, crisp-haired man, of a bulky figure and an easy temper - for that class of Caius Marius who sits upon the ruins of other people's Carthages, can keep up his spirits well enough. He had looked in at Solomon's shop sometimes, to ask a question about articles in Solomon's way of business; and Walter knew him sufficiently to give him good day when they met in the street. But as that was the extent of the broker's

acquaintance with Solomon Gills also, Walter was not a little surprised when he came back in the course of the forenoon, agreeably to his promise, to find Mr Brogley sitting in the back parlour with his hands in his pockets, and his hat hanging up behind the door.

'Well, Uncle Sol!' said Walter. The old man was sitting ruefully on the opposite side of the table, with his spectacles over his eyes, for a wonder, instead of on his forehead. 'How are you now?'

Solomon shook his head, and waved one hand towards the broker, as introducing him.

'Is there anything the matter?' asked Walter, with a catching in his breath.

'No, no. There's nothing the matter, said Mr Brogley. 'Don't let it put you out of the way.' Walter looked from the broker to his Uncle in mute amazement. 'The fact is,' said Mr Brogley, 'there's a little payment on a bond debt - three hundred and seventy odd, overdue: and I'm in possession.'

'In possession!' cried Walter, looking round at the shop.

'Ah!' said Mr Brogley, in confidential assent, and nodding his head as if he would urge the advisability of their all being comfortable together. 'It's an execution. That's what it is. Don't let it put you out of the way. I come myself, because of keeping it quiet and sociable. You know me. It's quite private.'

'Uncle Sol!' faltered Walter.

'Wally, my boy,' returned his uncle. 'It's the first time. Such a calamity never happened to me before. I'm an old man to begin.' Pushing up his spectacles again (for they were useless any longer to conceal his emotion), he covered his face with his hand, and sobbed aloud, and his tears fell down upon his coffee-coloured waistcoat.

'Uncle Sol! Pray! oh don't!' exclaimed Walter, who really felt a thrill of terror in seeing the old man weep. 'For God's sake don't do that. Mr Brogley, what shall I do?'

'I should recommend you looking up a friend or so,' said Mr Brogley, 'and talking it over.'

'To be sure!' cried Walter, catching at anything. 'Certainly! Thankee. Captain Cuttle's the man, Uncle. Wait till I run to Captain Cuttle. Keep your eye upon my Uncle, will you, Mr Brogley, and make him as

comfortable as you can while I am gone? Don't despair, Uncle Sol. Try and keep a good heart, there's a dear fellow!'

Saying this with great fervour, and disregarding the old man's broken remonstrances, Walter dashed out of the shop again as hard as he could go; and, having hurried round to the office to excuse himself on the plea of his Uncle's sudden illness, set off, full speed, for Captain Cuttle's residence.

Everything seemed altered as he ran along the streets. There were the usual entanglement and noise of carts, drays, omnibuses, waggons, and foot passengers, but the misfortune that had fallen on the wooden Midshipman made it strange and new. Houses and shops were different from what they used to be, and bore Mr Brogley's warrant on their fronts in large characters. The broker seemed to have got hold of the very churches; for their spires rose into the sky with an unwonted air. Even the sky itself was changed, and had an execution in it plainly.

Captain Cuttle lived on the brink of a little canal near the India Docks, where there was a swivel bridge which opened now and then to let some wandering monster of a ship come roamIng up the street like a stranded leviathan. The gradual change from land to water, on the approach to Captain Cuttle's lodgings, was curious. It began with the erection of flagstaffs, as appurtenances to public-houses; then came slop-sellers' shops, with Guernsey shirts, sou'wester hats, and canvas pantaloons, at once the tightest and the loosest of their order, hanging up outside. These were succeeded by anchor and chain-cable forges, where sledgehammers were dinging upon iron all day long. Then came rows of houses, with little vane-surmounted masts uprearing themselves from among the scarlet beans. Then, ditches. Then, pollard willows. Then, more ditches. Then, unaccountable patches of dirty water, hardly to be descried, for the ships that covered them. Then, the air was perfumed with chips; and all other trades were swallowed up in mast, oar, and block-making, and boatbuilding. Then, the ground grew marshy and unsettled. Then, there was nothing to be smelt but rum and sugar. Then, Captain Cuttle's lodgings - at once a first floor and a top storey, in Brig Place - were close before you.

The Captain was one of those timber-looking men, suits of oak as well as hearts, whom it is almost impossible for the liveliest imagination to separate from any part of their dress, however insignificant. Accordingly, when Walter knocked at the door, and the Captain instantly poked his head out of one of his little front windows, and hailed him, with the hard glared hat already on it, and the shirt-collar like a sail, and the wide suit of blue, all standing as usual, Walter was

as fully persuaded that he was always in that state, as if the Captain had been a bird and those had been his feathers.

'Wal'r, my lad!'said Captain Cuttle. 'Stand by and knock again. Hard! It's washing day.'

Walter, in his impatience, gave a prodigious thump with the knocker.

'Hard it is!' said Captain Cuttle, and immediately drew in his head, as if he expected a squall.

Nor was he mistaken: for a widow lady, with her sleeves rolled up to her shoulders, and her arms frothy with soap-suds and smoking with hot water, replied to the summons with startling rapidity. Before she looked at Walter she looked at the knocker, and then, measuring him with her eyes from head to foot, said she wondered he had left any of it.

'Captain Cuttle's at home, I know,' said Walter with a conciliatory smile.

'Is he?' replied the widow lady. 'In-deed!'

'He has just been speaking to me,' said Walter, in breathless explanation.

'Has he?' replied the widow lady. 'Then p'raps you'll give him Mrs MacStinger's respects, and say that the next time he lowers himself and his lodgings by talking out of the winder she'll thank him to come down and open the door too.' Mrs MacStinger spoke loud, and listened for any observations that might be offered from the first floor.

'I'll mention it,' said Walter, 'if you'll have the goodness to let me in, Ma'am.'

For he was repelled by a wooden fortification extending across the doorway, and put there to prevent the little MacStingers in their moments of recreation from tumbling down the steps.

'A boy that can knock my door down,' said Mrs MacStinger, contemptuously, 'can get over that, I should hope!' But Walter, taking this as a permission to enter, and getting over it, Mrs MacStinger immediately demanded whether an Englishwoman's house was her castle or not; and whether she was to be broke in upon by 'raff.' On these subjects her thirst for information was still very importunate, when Walter, having made his way up the little staircase through an artificial fog occasioned by the washing, which covered the banisters

with a clammy perspiration, entered Captain Cuttle's room, and found that gentleman in ambush behind the door.

'Never owed her a penny, Wal'r,' said Captain Cuttle, in a low voice, and with visible marks of trepidation on his countenance. 'Done her a world of good turns, and the children too. Vixen at times, though. Whew!'

'I should go away, Captain Cuttle,' said Walter.

'Dursn't do it, Wal'r,' returned the Captain. 'She'd find me out, wherever I went. Sit down. How's Gills?'

The Captain was dining (in his hat) off cold loin of mutton, porter, and some smoking hot potatoes, which he had cooked himself, and took out of a little saucepan before the fire as he wanted them. He unscrewed his hook at dinner-time, and screwed a knife into its wooden socket instead, with which he had already begun to peel one of these potatoes for Walter. His rooms were very small, and strongly impregnated with tobacco-smoke, but snug enough: everything being stowed away, as if there were an earthquake regularly every half-hour.

'How's Gills?' inquired the Captain. Walter, who had by this time recovered his breath, and lost his spirits - or such temporary spirits as his rapid journey had given him - looked at his questioner for a moment, said 'Oh, Captain Cuttle!' and burst into tears.

No words can describe the Captain's consternation at this sight Mrs MacStinger faded into nothing before it. He dropped the potato and the fork - and would have dropped the knife too if he could - and sat gazing at the boy, as if he expected to hear next moment that a gulf had opened in the City, which had swallowed up his old friend, coffee-coloured suit, buttons, chronometer, spectacles, and all.

But when Walter told him what was really the matter, Captain Cuttle, after a moment's reflection, started up into full activity. He emptied out of a little tin canister on the top shelf of the cupboard, his whole stock of ready money (amounting to thirteen pounds and half-a-crown), which he transferred to one of the pockets of his square blue coat; further enriched that repository with the contents of his plate chest, consisting of two withered atomies of tea-spoons, and an obsolete pair of knock-knee'd sugar-tongs; pulled up his immense double-cased silver watch from the depths in which it reposed, to assure himself that that valuable was sound and whole; re-attached the hook to his right wrist; and seizing the stick covered over with knobs, bade Walter come along.

Remembering, however, in the midst of his virtuous excitement, that Mrs MacStinger might be lying in wait below, Captain Cuttle hesitated at last, not without glancing at the window, as if he had some thoughts of escaping by that unusual means of egress, rather than encounter his terrible enemy. He decided, however, in favour of stratagem.

'Wal'r,' said the Captain, with a timid wink, 'go afore, my lad. Sing out, 'good-bye, Captain Cuttle,' when you're in the passage, and shut the door. Then wait at the corner of the street 'till you see me.

These directions were not issued without a previous knowledge of the enemy's tactics, for when Walter got downstairs, Mrs MacStinger glided out of the little back kitchen, like an avenging spirit. But not gliding out upon the Captain, as she had expected, she merely made a further allusion to the knocker, and glided in again.

Some five minutes elapsed before Captain Cuttle could summon courage to attempt his escape; for Walter waited so long at the street corner, looking back at the house, before there were any symptoms of the hard glazed hat. At length the Captain burst out of the door with the suddenness of an explosion, and coming towards him at a great pace, and never once looking over his shoulder, pretended, as soon as they were well out of the street, to whistle a tune.

'Uncle much hove down, Wal'r?' inquired the Captain, as they were walking along.

'I am afraid so. If you had seen him this morning, you would never have forgotten it.'

'Walk fast, Wal'r, my lad,' returned the Captain, mending his pace; 'and walk the same all the days of your life. Overhaul the catechism for that advice, and keep it!'

The Captain was too busy with his own thoughts of Solomon Gills, mingled perhaps with some reflections on his late escape from Mrs MacStinger, to offer any further quotations on the way for Walter's moral improvement They interchanged no other word until they arrived at old Sol's door, where the unfortunate wooden Midshipman, with his instrument at his eye, seemed to be surveying the whole horizon in search of some friend to help him out of his difficulty.

'Gills!' said the Captain, hurrying into the back parlour, and taking him by the hand quite tenderly. 'Lay your head well to the wind, and we'll fight through it. All you've got to do,' said the Captain, with the solemnity of a man who was delivering himself of one of the most

precious practical tenets ever discovered by human wisdom, 'is to lay your head well to the wind, and we'll fight through it!'

Old Sol returned the pressure of his hand, and thanked him.

Captain Cuttle, then, with a gravity suitable to the nature of the occasion, put down upon the table the two tea-spoons and the sugar-tongs, the silver watch, and the ready money; and asked Mr Brogley, the broker, what the damage was.

'Come! What do you make of it?' said Captain Cuttle.

'Why, Lord help you!' returned the broker; 'you don't suppose that property's of any use, do you?'

'Why not?' inquired the Captain.

'Why? The amount's three hundred and seventy, odd,' replied the broker.

'Never mind,' returned the Captain, though he was evidently dismayed by the figures: 'all's fish that comes to your net, I suppose?'

'Certainly,' said Mr Brogley. 'But sprats ain't whales, you know.'

The philosophy of this observation seemed to strike the Captain. He ruminated for a minute; eyeing the broker, meanwhile, as a deep genius; and then called the Instrument-maker aside.

'Gills,' said Captain Cuttle, 'what's the bearings of this business? Who's the creditor?'

'Hush!' returned the old man. 'Come away. Don't speak before Wally. It's a matter of security for Wally's father - an old bond. I've paid a good deal of it, Ned, but the times are so bad with me that I can't do more just now. I've foreseen it, but I couldn't help it. Not a word before Wally, for all the world.'

'You've got some money, haven't you?' whispered the Captain.

'Yes, yes - oh yes- I've got some,' returned old Sol, first putting his hands into his empty pockets, and then squeezing his Welsh wig between them, as if he thought he might wring some gold out of it; 'but I - the little I have got, isn't convertible, Ned; it can't be got at. I have been trying to do something with it for Wally, and I'm old fashioned, and behind the time. It's here and there, and - and, in short, it's as good as nowhere,' said the old man, looking in bewilderment about him.

He had so much the air of a half-witted person who had been hiding his money in a variety of places, and had forgotten where, that the Captain followed his eyes, not without a faint hope that he might remember some few hundred pounds concealed up the chimney, or down in the cellar. But Solomon Gills knew better than that.

'I'm behind the time altogether, my dear Ned,' said Sol, in resigned despair, 'a long way. It's no use my lagging on so far behind it. The stock had better be sold - it's worth more than this debt - and I had better go and die somewhere, on the balance. I haven't any energy left. I don't understand things. This had better be the end of it. Let 'em sell the stock and take him down,' said the old man, pointing feebly to the wooden Midshipman, 'and let us both be broken up together.'

'And what d'ye mean to do with Wal'r?'said the Captain. 'There, there! Sit ye down, Gills, sit ye down, and let me think o' this. If I warn't a man on a small annuity, that was large enough till to-day, I hadn't need to think of it. But you only lay your head well to the wind,' said the Captain, again administering that unanswerable piece of consolation, 'and you're all right!'

Old Sol thanked him from his heart, and went and laid it against the back parlour fire-place instead.

Captain Cuttle walked up and down the shop for some time, cogitating profoundly, and bringing his bushy black eyebrows to bear so heavily on his nose, like clouds setting on a mountain, that Walter was afraid to offer any interruption to the current of his reflections. Mr Brogley, who was averse to being any constraint upon the party, and who had an ingenious cast of mind, went, softly whistling, among the stock; rattling weather-glasses, shaking compasses as if they were physic, catching up keys with loadstones, looking through telescopes, endeavouring to make himself acquainted with the use of the globes, setting parallel rulers astride on to his nose, and amusing himself with other philosophical transactions.

'Wal'r!' said the Captain at last. 'I've got it.'

'Have you, Captain Cuttle?' cried Walter, with great animation.

'Come this way, my lad,' said the Captain. 'The stock's the security. I'm another. Your governor's the man to advance money.'

'Mr Dombey!' faltered Walter.

The Captain nodded gravely. 'Look at him,' he said. 'Look at Gills. If they was to sell off these things now, he'd die of it. You know he

would. We mustn't leave a stone unturned - and there's a stone for you.'

'A stone! - Mr Dombey!' faltered Walter.

'You run round to the office, first of all, and see if he's there,' said Captain Cuttle, clapping him on the back. 'Quick!'

Walter felt he must not dispute the command - a glance at his Uncle would have determined him if he had felt otherwise - and disappeared to execute it. He soon returned, out of breath, to say that Mr Dombey was not there. It was Saturday, and he had gone to Brighton.

'I tell you what, Wal'r!' said the Captain, who seemed to have prepared himself for this contingency in his absence. 'We'll go to Brighton. I'll back you, my boy. I'll back you, Wal'r. We'll go to Brighton by the afternoon's coach.'

If the application must be made to Mr Dombey at all, which was awful to think of, Walter felt that he would rather prefer it alone and unassisted, than backed by the personal influence of Captain Cuttle, to which he hardly thought Mr Dombey would attach much weight. But as the Captain appeared to be of quite another opinion, and was bent upon it, and as his friendship was too zealous and serious to be trifled with by one so much younger than himself, he forbore to hint the least objection. Cuttle, therefore, taking a hurried leave of Solomon Gills, and returning the ready money, the teaspoons, the sugar-tongs, and the silver watch, to his pocket - with a view, as Walter thought, with horror, to making a gorgeous impression on Mr Dombey - bore him off to the coach-office, with- out a minute's delay, and repeatedly assured him, on the road, that he would stick by him to the last.