

## **Chapter XVII - Captain Cuttle Does A Little Business For The Young People**

Captain Cuttle, in the exercise of that surprising talent for deep-laid and unfathomable scheming, with which (as is not unusual in men of transparent simplicity) he sincerely believed himself to be endowed by nature, had gone to Mr Dombey's house on the eventful Sunday, winking all the way as a vent for his superfluous sagacity, and had presented himself in the full lustre of the ankle-jacks before the eyes of Towlinson. Hearing from that individual, to his great concern, of the impending calamity, Captain Cuttle, in his delicacy, sheered off again confounded; merely handing in the nosegay as a small mark of his solicitude, and leaving his respectful compliments for the family in general, which he accompanied with an expression of his hope that they would lay their heads well to the wind under existing circumstances, and a friendly intimation that he would 'look up again' to-morrow.

The Captain's compliments were never heard of any more. The Captain's nosegay, after lying in the hall all night, was swept into the dust-bin next morning; and the Captain's sly arrangement, involved in one catastrophe with greater hopes and loftier designs, was crushed to pieces. So, when an avalanche bears down a mountain-forest, twigs and bushes suffer with the trees, and all perish together.

When Walter returned home on the Sunday evening from his long walk, and its memorable close, he was too much occupied at first by the tidings he had to give them, and by the emotions naturally awakened in his breast by the scene through which he had passed, to observe either that his Uncle was evidently unacquainted with the intelligence the Captain had undertaken to impart, or that the Captain made signals with his hook, warning him to avoid the subject. Not that the Captain's signals were calculated to have proved very comprehensible, however attentively observed; for, like those Chinese sages who are said in their conferences to write certain learned words in the air that are wholly impossible of pronunciation, the Captain made such waves and flourishes as nobody without a previous knowledge of his mystery, would have been at all likely to understand.

Captain Cuttle, however, becoming cognisant of what had happened, relinquished these attempts, as he perceived the slender chance that now existed of his being able to obtain a little easy chat with Mr Dombey before the period of Walter's departure. But in admitting to himself, with a disappointed and crestfallen countenance, that Sol Gills must be told, and that Walter must go - taking the case for the present as he found it, and not having it enlightened or improved beforehand by the knowing management of a friend - the Captain still felt an unabated confidence that he, Ned Cuttle, was the man for Mr

Dombey; and that, to set Walter's fortunes quite square, nothing was wanted but that they two should come together. For the Captain never could forget how well he and Mr Dombey had got on at Brighton; with what nicety each of them had put in a word when it was wanted; how exactly they had taken one another's measure; nor how Ned Cuttle had pointed out that resources in the first extremity, and had brought the interview to the desired termination. On all these grounds the Captain soothed himself with thinking that though Ned Cuttle was forced by the pressure of events to 'stand by' almost useless for the present, Ned would fetch up with a wet sail in good time, and carry all before him.

Under the influence of this good-natured delusion, Captain Cuttle even went so far as to revolve in his own bosom, while he sat looking at Walter and listening with a tear on his shirt-collar to what he related, whether it might not be at once genteel and politic to give Mr Dombey a verbal invitation, whenever they should meet, to come and cut his mutton in Brig Place on some day of his own naming, and enter on the question of his young friend's prospects over a social glass. But the uncertain temper of Mrs MacStinger, and the possibility of her setting up her rest in the passage during such an entertainment, and there delivering some homily of an uncomplimentary nature, operated as a check on the Captain's hospitable thoughts, and rendered him timid of giving them encouragement.

One fact was quite clear to the Captain, as Walter, sitting thoughtfully over his untasted dinner, dwelt on all that had happened; namely, that however Walter's modesty might stand in the way of his perceiving it himself, he was, as one might say, a member of Mr Dombey's family. He had been, in his own person, connected with the incident he so pathetically described; he had been by name remembered and commended in close association with it; and his fortunes must have a particular interest in his employer's eyes. If the Captain had any lurking doubt whatever of his own conclusions, he had not the least doubt that they were good conclusions for the peace of mind of the Instrument-maker. Therefore he availed himself of so favourable a moment for breaking the West Indian intelligence to his friend, as a piece of extraordinary preferment; declaring that for his part he would freely give a hundred thousand pounds (if he had it) for Walter's gain in the long-run, and that he had no doubt such an investment would yield a handsome premium.

Solomon Gills was at first stunned by the communication, which fell upon the little back-parlour like a thunderbolt, and tore up the hearth savagely. But the Captain flashed such golden prospects before his dim sight: hinted so mysteriously at 'Whittingtonian consequences; laid such emphasis on what Walter had just now told them: and

appealed to it so confidently as a corroboration of his predictions, and a great advance towards the realisation of the romantic legend of Lovely Peg: that he bewildered the old man. Walter, for his part, feigned to be so full of hope and ardour, and so sure of coming home again soon, and backed up the Captain with such expressive shakings of his head and rubbings of his hands, that Solomon, looking first at him then at Captain Cuttle, began to think he ought to be transported with joy.

'But I'm behind the time, you understand,' he observed in apology, passing his hand nervously down the whole row of bright buttons on his coat, and then up again, as if they were beads and he were telling them twice over: 'and I would rather have my dear boy here. It's an old-fashioned notion, I daresay. He was always fond of the sea He's' - and he looked wistfully at Walter - 'he's glad to go.'

'Uncle Sol!' cried Walter, quickly, 'if you say that, I won't go. No, Captain Cuttle, I won't. If my Uncle thinks I could be glad to leave him, though I was going to be made Governor of all the Islands in the West Indies, that's enough. I'm a fixture.'

'Wal'r, my lad,' said the Captain. 'Steady! Sol Gills, take an observation of your nevy.'

Following with his eyes the majestic action of the Captain's hook, the old man looked at Walter.

'Here is a certain craft,' said the Captain, with a magnificent sense of the allegory into which he was soaring, 'a-going to put out on a certain voyage. What name is wrote upon that craft indelibly? Is it The Gay? or,' said the Captain, raising his voice as much as to say, observe the point of this, 'is it The Gills?'

'Ned,' said the old man, drawing Walter to his side, and taking his arm tenderly through his, 'I know. I know. Of course I know that Wally considers me more than himself always. That's in my mind. When I say he is glad to go, I mean I hope he is. Eh? look you, Ned and you too, Wally, my dear, this is new and unexpected to me; and I'm afraid my being behind the time, and poor, is at the bottom of it. Is it really good fortune for him, do you tell me, now?' said the old man, looking anxiously from one to the other. 'Really and truly? Is it? I can reconcile myself to almost anything that advances Wally, but I won't have Wally putting himself at any disadvantage for me, or keeping anything from me. You, Ned Cuttle!' said the old man, fastening on the Captain, to the manifest confusion of that diplomatist; 'are you dealing plainly by your old friend? Speak out, Ned Cuttle. Is there anything behind? Ought he to go? How do you know it first, and why?'

As it was a contest of affection and self-denial, Walter struck in with infinite effect, to the Captain's relief; and between them they tolerably reconciled old Sol Gills, by continued talking, to the project; or rather so confused him, that nothing, not even the pain of separation, was distinctly clear to his mind.

He had not much time to balance the matter; for on the very next day, Walter received from Mr Carker the Manager, the necessary credentials for his passage and outfit, together with the information that the Son and Heir would sail in a fortnight, or within a day or two afterwards at latest. In the hurry of preparation: which Walter purposely enhanced as much as possible: the old man lost what little selfpossession he ever had; and so the time of departure drew on rapidly.

The Captain, who did not fail to make himself acquainted with all that passed, through inquiries of Walter from day to day, found the time still tending on towards his going away, without any occasion offering itself, or seeming likely to offer itself, for a better understanding of his position. It was after much consideration of this fact, and much pondering over such an unfortunate combination of circumstances, that a bright idea occurred to the Captain. Suppose he made a call on Mr Carker, and tried to find out from him how the land really lay!

Captain Cuttle liked this idea very much. It came upon him in a moment of inspiration, as he was smoking an early pipe in Brig Place after breakfast; and it was worthy of the tobacco. It would quiet his conscience, which was an honest one, and was made a little uneasy by what Walter had confided to him, and what Sol Gills had said; and it would be a deep, shrewd act of friendship. He would sound Mr Carker carefully, and say much or little, just as he read that gentleman's character, and discovered that they got on well together or the reverse.

Accordingly, without the fear of Walter before his eyes (who he knew was at home packing), Captain Cuttle again assumed his ankle-jacks and mourning brooch, and issued forth on this second expedition. He purchased no propitiatory nosegay on the present occasion, as he was going to a place of business; but he put a small sunflower in his button-hole to give himself an agreeable relish of the country; and with this, and the knobby stick, and the glazed hat, bore down upon the offices of Dombey and Son.

After taking a glass of warm rum-and-water at a tavern close by, to collect his thoughts, the Captain made a rush down the court, lest its good effects should evaporate, and appeared suddenly to Mr Perch.

'Matey,' said the Captain, in persuasive accents. 'One of your Governors is named Carker.' Mr Perch admitted it; but gave him to understand, as in official duty bound, that all his Governors were engaged, and never expected to be disengaged any more.

'Look'ee here, mate,' said the Captain in his ear; 'my name's Cap'en Cuttle.' The Captain would have hooked Perch gently to him, but Mr Perch eluded the attempt; not so much in design, as in starting at the sudden thought that such a weapon unexpectedly exhibited to Mrs Perch might, in her then condition, be destructive to that lady's hopes.

'If you'll be so good as just report Cap'en Cuttle here, when you get a chance,' said the Captain, 'I'll wait.'

Saying which, the Captain took his seat on Mr Perch's bracket, and drawing out his handkerchief from the crown of the glazed hat which he jammed between his knees (without injury to its shape, for nothing human could bend it), rubbed his head well all over, and appeared refreshed. He subsequently arranged his hair with his hook, and sat looking round the office, contemplating the clerks with a serene respect.

The Captain's equanimity was so impenetrable, and he was altogether so mysterious a being, that Perch the messenger was daunted.

'What name was it you said?' asked Mr Perch, bending down over him as he sat on the bracket.

'Cap'en,' in a deep hoarse whisper.

'Yes,' said Mr Perch, keeping time with his head.

'Cuttle.'

'Oh!' said Mr Perch, in the same tone, for he caught it, and couldn't help it; the Captain, in his diplomacy, was so impressive. 'I'll see if he's disengaged now. I don't know. Perhaps he may be for a minute.'

'Ay, ay, my lad, I won't detain him longer than a minute,' said the Captain, nodding with all the weighty importance that he felt within him. Perch, soon returning, said, 'Will Captain Cuttle walk this way?'

Mr Carker the Manager, standing on the hearth-rug before the empty fireplace, which was ornamented with a castellated sheet of brown paper, looked at the Captain as he came in, with no very special encouragement.

'Mr Carker?' said Captain Cuttle.

'I believe so,' said Mr Carker, showing all his teeth.

The Captain liked his answering with a smile; it looked pleasant. 'You see,' began the Captain, rolling his eyes slowly round the little room, and taking in as much of it as his shirt-collar permitted; 'I'm a seafaring man myself, Mr Carker, and Wal'r, as is on your books here, is almost a son of mine.'

'Walter Gay?' said Mr Carker, showing all his teeth again.

'Wal'r Gay it is,' replied the Captain, 'right!' The Captain's manner expressed a warm approval of Mr Carker's quickness of perception. 'I'm an intimate friend of his and his Uncle's. Perhaps,' said the Captain, 'you may have heard your head Governor mention my name?' - Captain Cuttle.'

'No!' said Mr Carker, with a still wider demonstration than before.

'Well,' resumed the Captain, 'I've the pleasure of his acquaintance. I waited upon him down on the Sussex coast there, with my young friend Wal'r, when - in short, when there was a little accommodation wanted.' The Captain nodded his head in a manner that was at once comfortable, easy, and expressive. 'You remember, I daresay?'

'I think,' said Mr Carker, 'I had the honour of arranging the business.'

'To be sure!' returned the Captain. 'Right again! you had. Now I've took the liberty of coming here -'

'Won't you sit down?' said Mr Carker, smiling.

'Thank'ee,' returned the Captain, availing himself of the offer. 'A man does get more way upon himself, perhaps, in his conversation, when he sits down. Won't you take a cheer yourself?'

'No thank you,' said the Manager, standing, perhaps from the force of winter habit, with his back against the chimney-piece, and looking down upon the Captain with an eye in every tooth and gum. 'You have taken the liberty, you were going to say - though it's none -'

'Thank'ee kindly, my lad,' returned the Captain: 'of coming here, on account of my friend Wal'r. Sol Gills, his Uncle, is a man of science, and in science he may be considered a clipper; but he ain't what I should altogether call an able seaman - not a man of practice. Wal'r is as trim a lad as ever stepped; but he's a little down by the head in one respect, and that is, modesty. Now what I should wish to put to you,' said the Captain, lowering his voice, and speaking in a kind of confidential growl, 'in a friendly way, entirely between you and me,

and for my own private reckoning, 'till your head Governor has wore round a bit, and I can come alongside of him, is this - Is everything right and comfortable here, and is Wal'r out'ard bound with a pretty fair wind?'

'What do you think now, Captain Cuttle?' returned Carker, gathering up his skirts and settling himself in his position. 'You are a practical man; what do you think?'

The acuteness and the significance of the Captain's eye as he cocked it in reply, no words short of those unutterable Chinese words before referred to could describe.

'Come!' said the Captain, unspeakably encouraged, 'what do you say? Am I right or wrong?'

So much had the Captain expressed in his eye, emboldened and incited by Mr Carker's smiling urbanity, that he felt himself in as fair a condition to put the question, as if he had expressed his sentiments with the utmost elaboration.

'Right,' said Mr Carker, 'I have no doubt.'

'Out'ard bound with fair weather, then, I say,' cried Captain Cuttle.

Mr Carker smiled assent.

'Wind right astarn, and plenty of it,' pursued the Captain.

Mr Carker smiled assent again.

'Ay, ay!' said Captain Cuttle, greatly relieved and pleased. 'I know'd how she headed, well enough; I told Wal'r so. Thank'ee, thank'ee.'

'Gay has brilliant prospects,' observed Mr Carker, stretching his mouth wider yet: 'all the world before him.'

'All the world and his wife too, as the saying is,' returned the delighted Captain.

At the word 'wife' (which he had uttered without design), the Captain stopped, cocked his eye again, and putting the glazed hat on the top of the knobby stick, gave it a twirl, and looked sideways at his always smiling friend.

'I'd bet a gill of old Jamaica,' said the Captain, eyeing him attentively, 'that I know what you're a smiling at.'

Mr Carker took his cue, and smiled the more.

'It goes no farther?' said the Captain, making a poke at the door with the knobby stick to assure himself that it was shut.

'Not an inch,' said Mr Carker.

'You're thinking of a capital F perhaps?' said the Captain.

Mr Carker didn't deny it.

'Anything about a L,' said the Captain, 'or a O?'

Mr Carker still smiled.

'Am I right, again?' inquired the Captain in a whisper, with the scarlet circle on his forehead swelling in his triumphant joy.

Mr Carker, in reply, still smiling, and now nodding assent, Captain Cuttle rose and squeezed him by the hand, assuring him, warmly, that they were on the same tack, and that as for him (Cuttle) he had laid his course that way all along. 'He know'd her first,' said the Captain, with all the secrecy and gravity that the subject demanded, 'in an uncommon manner - you remember his finding her in the street when she was a'most a babby - he has liked her ever since, and she him, as much as two youngsters can. We've always said, Sol Gills and me, that they was cut out for each other.'

A cat, or a monkey, or a hyena, or a death's-head, could not have shown the Captain more teeth at one time, than Mr Carker showed him at this period of their interview.

'There's a general indraught that way,' observed the happy Captain. 'Wind and water sets in that direction, you see. Look at his being present t'other day!'

'Most favourable to his hopes,' said Mr Carker.

'Look at his being towed along in the wake of that day!' pursued the Captain. 'Why what can cut him adrift now?'

'Nothing,' replied Mr Carker.

'You're right again,' returned the Captain, giving his hand another squeeze. 'Nothing it is. So! steady! There's a son gone: pretty little creetur. Ain't there?'

'Yes, there's a son gone,' said the acquiescent Carker.



'Pass the word, and there's another ready for you,' quoth the Captain. 'Nevy of a scientific Uncle! Nevy of Sol Gills! Wal'r! Wal'r, as is already in your business! And' - said the Captain, rising gradually to a quotation he was preparing for a final burst, 'who - comes from Sol Gills's daily, to your business, and your buzzums.' The Captain's complacency as he gently jogged Mr Carker with his elbow, on concluding each of the foregoing short sentences, could be surpassed by nothing but the exultation with which he fell back and eyed him when he had finished this brilliant display of eloquence and sagacity; his great blue waistcoat heaving with the throes of such a masterpiece, and his nose in a state of violent inflammation from the same cause.

'Am I right?' said the Captain.

'Captain Cuttle,' said Mr Carker, bending down at the knees, for a moment, in an odd manner, as if he were falling together to hug the whole of himself at once, 'your views in reference to Walter Gay are thoroughly and accurately right. I understand that we speak together in confidence.

'Honour!' interposed the Captain. 'Not a word.'

'To him or anyone?' pursued the Manager.

Captain Cuttle frowned and shook his head.

'But merely for your own satisfaction and guidance - and guidance, of course,' repeated Mr Carker, 'with a view to your future proceedings.'

'Thank'ee kindly, I am sure,' said the Captain, listening with great attention.

'I have no hesitation in saying, that's the fact. You have hit the probabilities exactly.'

'And with regard to your head Governor,' said the Captain, 'why an interview had better come about nat'ral between us. There's time enough.'

Mr Carker, with his mouth from ear to ear, repeated, 'Time enough.' Not articulating the words, but bowing his head affably, and forming them with his tongue and lips.

'And as I know - it's what I always said- that Wal'r's in a way to make his fortune,' said the Captain.

'To make his fortune,' Mr Carker repeated, in the same dumb manner.

'And as Wal'r's going on this little voyage is, as I may say, in his day's work, and a part of his general expectations here,' said the Captain.

'Of his general expectations here,' assented Mr Carker, dumbly as before.

'Why, so long as I know that,' pursued the Captain, 'there's no hurry, and my mind's at ease.

Mr Carker still blandly assenting in the same voiceless manner, Captain Cuttle was strongly confirmed in his opinion that he was one of the most agreeable men he had ever met, and that even Mr Dombey might improve himself on such a model. With great heartiness, therefore, the Captain once again extended his enormous hand (not unlike an old block in colour), and gave him a grip that left upon his smoother flesh a proof impression of the chinks and crevices with which the Captain's palm was liberally tattooed.

'Farewell!' said the Captain. 'I ain't a man of many words, but I take it very kind of you to be so friendly, and above-board. You'll excuse me if I've been at all intruding, will you?' said the Captain.

'Not at all,' returned the other.

'Thank'ee. My berth ain't very roomy,' said the Captain, turning back again, 'but it's tolerably snug; and if you was to find yourself near Brig Place, number nine, at any time - will you make a note of it? - and would come upstairs, without minding what was said by the person at the door, I should be proud to see you.

With that hospitable invitation, the Captain said 'Good day!' and walked out and shut the door; leaving Mr Carker still reclining against the chimney-piece. In whose sly look and watchful manner; in whose false mouth, stretched but not laughing; in whose spotless cravat and very whiskers; even in whose silent passing of his soft hand over his white linen and his smooth face; there was something desperately cat-like.

The unconscious Captain walked out in a state of self-glorification that imparted quite a new cut to the broad blue suit. 'Stand by, Ned!' said the Captain to himself. 'You've done a little business for the youngsters today, my lad!'

In his exultation, and in his familiarity, present and prospective, with the House, the Captain, when he reached the outer office, could not refrain from rallying Mr Perch a little, and asking him whether he thought everybody was still engaged. But not to be bitter on a man who had done his duty, the Captain whispered in his ear, that if he

felt disposed for a glass of rum-and-water, and would follow, he would be happy to bestow the same upon him.

Before leaving the premises, the Captain, somewhat to the astonishment of the clerks, looked round from a central point of view, and took a general survey of the officers part and parcel of a project in which his young friend was nearly interested. The strong-room excited his especial admiration; but, that he might not appear too particular, he limited himself to an approving glance, and, with a graceful recognition of the clerks as a body, that was full of politeness and patronage, passed out into the court. Being promptly joined by Mr Perch, he conveyed that gentleman to the tavern, and fulfilled his pledge - hastily, for Perch's time was precious.

'I'll give you for a toast,' said the Captain, 'Wal'r!'

'Who?' submitted Mr Perch.

'Wal'r!' repeated the Captain, in a voice of thunder.

Mr Perch, who seemed to remember having heard in infancy that there was once a poet of that name, made no objection; but he was much astonished at the Captain's coming into the City to propose a poet; indeed, if he had proposed to put a poet's statue up - say Shakespeare's for example - in a civic thoroughfare, he could hardly have done a greater outrage to Mr Perch's experience. On the whole, he was such a mysterious and incomprehensible character, that Mr Perch decided not to mention him to Mrs Perch at all, in case of giving rise to any disagreeable consequences.

Mysterious and incomprehensible, the Captain, with that lively sense upon him of having done a little business for the youngsters, remained all day, even to his most intimate friends; and but that Walter attributed his winks and grins, and other such pantomimic reliefs of himself, to his satisfaction in the success of their innocent deception upon old Sol Gills, he would assuredly have betrayed himself before night. As it was, however, he kept his own secret; and went home late from the Instrument-maker's house, wearing the glazed hat so much on one side, and carrying such a beaming expression in his eyes, that Mrs MacStinger (who might have been brought up at Doctor Blimber's, she was such a Roman matron) fortified herself, at the first glimpse of him, behind the open street door, and refused to come out to the contemplation of her blessed infants, until he was securely lodged in his own room.