

Chapter XXII - A Trifle of Management by Mr Carker the Manager

Mr Carker the Manager sat at his desk, smooth and soft as usual, reading those letters which were reserved for him to open, backing them occasionally with such memoranda and references as their business purport required, and parcelling them out into little heaps for distribution through the several departments of the House. The post had come in heavy that morning, and Mr Carker the Manager had a good deal to do.

The general action of a man so engaged - pausing to look over a bundle of papers in his hand, dealing them round in various portions, taking up another bundle and examining its contents with knitted brows and pursed-out lips - dealing, and sorting, and pondering by turns - would easily suggest some whimsical resemblance to a player at cards. The face of Mr Carker the Manager was in good keeping with such a fancy. It was the face of a man who studied his play, warily: who made himself master of all the strong and weak points of the game: who registered the cards in his mind as they fell about him, knew exactly what was on them, what they missed, and what they made: who was crafty to find out what the other players held, and who never betrayed his own hand.

The letters were in various languages, but Mr Carker the Manager read them all. If there had been anything in the offices of Dombey and Son that he could read, there would have been a card wanting in the pack. He read almost at a glance, and made combinations of one letter with another and one business with another as he went on, adding new matter to the heaps - much as a man would know the cards at sight, and work out their combinations in his mind after they were turned. Something too deep for a partner, and much too deep for an adversary, Mr Carker the Manager sat in the rays of the sun that came down slanting on him through the skylight, playing his game alone.

And although it is not among the instincts wild or domestic of the cat tribe to play at cards, feline from sole to crown was Mr Carker the Manager, as he basked in the strip of summer-light and warmth that shone upon his table and the ground as if they were a crooked dial-plate, and himself the only figure on it. With hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but feebler than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr Carker the Manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit,

sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.

At length the letters were disposed of, excepting one which he reserved for a particular audience. Having locked the more confidential correspondence in a drawer, Mr Carker the Manager rang his bell.

'Why do you answer it?' was his reception of his brother.

'The messenger is out, and I am the next,' was the submissive reply.

'You are the next?' muttered the Manager. 'Yes! Creditable to me! There!'

Pointing to the heaps of opened letters, he turned disdainfully away, in his elbow-chair, and broke the seal of that one which he held in his hand.

'I am sorry to trouble you, James,' said the brother, gathering them up, 'but - '

'Oh! you have something to say. I knew that. Well?'

Mr Carker the Manager did not raise his eyes or turn them on his brother, but kept them on his letter, though without opening it.

'Well?' he repeated sharply.

'I am uneasy about Harriet.'

'Harriet who? what Harriet? I know nobody of that name.'

'She is not well, and has changed very much of late.'

'She changed very much, a great many years ago,' replied the Manager; 'and that is all I have to say.'

'I think if you would hear me -'

'Why should I hear you, Brother John?' returned the Manager, laying a sarcastic emphasis on those two words, and throwing up his head, but not lifting his eyes. 'I tell you, Harriet Carker made her choice many years ago between her two brothers. She may repent it, but she must abide by it.'

'Don't mistake me. I do not say she does repent it. It would be black ingratitude in me to hint at such a thing,' returned the other. 'Though believe me, James, I am as sorry for her sacrifice as you.'

'As I?' exclaimed the Manager. 'As I?'

'As sorry for her choice - for what you call her choice - as you are angry at it,' said the Junior.

'Angry?' repeated the other, with a wide show of his teeth.

'Displeased. Whatever word you like best. You know my meaning. There is no offence in my intention.'

'There is offence in everything you do,' replied his brother, glancing at him with a sudden scowl, which in a moment gave place to a wider smile than the last. 'Carry those papers away, if you please. I am busy.'

His politeness was so much more cutting than his wrath, that the Junior went to the door. But stopping at it, and looking round, he said:

'When Harriet tried in vain to plead for me with you, on your first just indignation, and my first disgrace; and when she left you, James, to follow my broken fortunes, and devote herself, in her mistaken affection, to a ruined brother, because without her he had no one, and was lost; she was young and pretty. I think if you could see her now - if you would go and see her - she would move your admiration and compassion.'

The Manager inclined his head, and showed his teeth, as who should say, in answer to some careless small-talk, 'Dear me! Is that the case?' but said never a word.

'We thought in those days: you and I both: that she would marry young, and lead a happy and light-hearted life,' pursued the other. 'Oh if you knew how cheerfully she cast those hopes away; how cheerfully she has gone forward on the path she took, and never once looked back; you never could say again that her name was strange in your ears. Never!'

Again the Manager inclined his head and showed his teeth, and seemed to say, 'Remarkable indeed! You quite surprise me!' And again he uttered never a word.

'May I go on?' said John Carker, mildly.

'On your way?' replied his smiling brother. 'If you will have the goodness.'

John Carker, with a sigh, was passing slowly out at the door, when his brother's voice detained him for a moment on the threshold.

'If she has gone, and goes, her own way cheerfully,' he said, throwing the still unfolded letter on his desk, and putting his hands firmly in his pockets, 'you may tell her that I go as cheerfully on mine. If she has never once looked back, you may tell her that I have, sometimes, to recall her taking part with you, and that my resolution is no easier to wear away;' he smiled very sweetly here; 'than marble.'

'I tell her nothing of you. We never speak about you. Once a year, on your birthday, Harriet says always, 'Let us remember James by name, and wish him happy,' but we say no more'

'Tell it then, if you please,' returned the other, 'to yourself. You can't repeat it too often, as a lesson to you to avoid the subject in speaking to me. I know no Harriet Carker. There is no such person. You may have a sister; make much of her. I have none.'

Mr Carker the Manager took up the letter again, and waved it with a smile of mock courtesy towards the door. Unfolding it as his brother withdrew, and looking darkly after him as he left the room, he once more turned round in his elbow-chair, and applied himself to a diligent perusal of its contents.

It was in the writing of his great chief, Mr Dombey, and dated from Leamington. Though he was a quick reader of all other letters, Mr Carker read this slowly; weighing the words as he went, and bringing every tooth in his head to bear upon them. When he had read it through once, he turned it over again, and picked out these passages. 'I find myself benefited by the change, and am not yet inclined to name any time for my return.' 'I wish, Carker, you would arrange to come down once and see me here, and let me know how things are going on, in person.' 'I omitted to speak to you about young Gay. If not gone per Son and Heir, or if Son and Heir still lying in the Docks, appoint some other young man and keep him in the City for the present. I am not decided.' 'Now that's unfortunate!' said Mr Carker the Manager, expanding his mouth, as if it were made of India-rubber: 'for he's far away.'

Still that passage, which was in a postscript, attracted his attention and his teeth, once more.

'I think,' he said, 'my good friend Captain Cuttle mentioned something about being towed along in the wake of that day. What a pity he's so far away!'

He refolded the letter, and was sitting trifling with it, standing it long-wise and broad-wise on his table, and turning it over and over on all sides - doing pretty much the same thing, perhaps, by its contents - when Mr Perch the messenger knocked softly at the door, and coming in on tiptoe, bending his body at every step as if it were the delight of his life to bow, laid some papers on the table.

'Would you please to be engaged, Sir?' asked Mr Perch, rubbing his hands, and deferentially putting his head on one side, like a man who felt he had no business to hold it up in such a presence, and would keep it as much out of the way as possible.

'Who wants me?'

'Why, Sir,' said Mr Perch, in a soft voice, 'really nobody, Sir, to speak of at present. Mr Gills the Ship's Instrument-maker, Sir, has looked in, about a little matter of payment, he says: but I mentioned to him, Sir, that you was engaged several deep; several deep.'

Mr Perch coughed once behind his hand, and waited for further orders.

'Anybody else?'

'Well, Sir,' said Mr Perch, 'I wouldn't of my own self take the liberty of mentioning, Sir, that there was anybody else; but that same young lad that was here yesterday, Sir, and last week, has been hanging about the place; and it looks, Sir,' added Mr Perch, stopping to shut the door, 'dreadful unbusiness-like to see him whistling to the sparrows down the court, and making of 'em answer him.'

'You said he wanted something to do, didn't you, Perch?' asked Mr Carker, leaning back in his chair and looking at that officer.

'Why, Sir,' said Mr Perch, coughing behind his hand again, 'his expression certainly were that he was in wants of a sitiuation, and that he considered something might be done for him about the Docks, being used to fishing with a rod and line: but - ' Mr Perch shook his head very dubiously indeed.

'What does he say when he comes?' asked Mr Carker.

'Indeed, Sir,' said Mr Perch, coughing another cough behind his hand, which was always his resource as an expression of humility when nothing else occurred to him, 'his observation generally air that he would humbly wish to see one of the gentlemen, and that he wants to earn a living. But you see, Sir,' added Perch, dropping his voice to a whisper, and turning, in the inviolable nature of his confidence, to

give the door a thrust with his hand and knee, as if that would shut it any more when it was shut already, 'it's hardly to be bore, Sir, that a common lad like that should come a prowling here, and saying that his mother nursed our House's young gentleman, and that he hopes our House will give him a chance on that account. I am sure, Sir,' observed Mr Perch, 'that although Mrs Perch was at that time nursing as thriving a little girl, Sir, as we've ever took the liberty of adding to our family, I wouldn't have made so free as drop a hint of her being capable of imparting nourishment, not if it was never so!'

Mr Carker grinned at him like a shark, but in an absent, thoughtful manner.

'Whether,' submitted Mr Perch, after a short silence, and another cough, 'it mightn't be best for me to tell him, that if he was seen here any more he would be given into custody; and to keep to it! With respect to bodily fear,' said Mr Perch, 'I'm so timid, myself, by nature, Sir, and my nerves is so unstrung by Mrs Perch's state, that I could take my affidavit easy.'

'Let me see this fellow, Perch,' said Mr Carker. 'Bring him in!'

'Yes, Sir. Begging your pardon, Sir,' said Mr Perch, hesitating at the door, 'he's rough, Sir, in appearance.'

'Never mind. If he's there, bring him in. I'll see Mr Gills directly. Ask him to wait.'

Mr Perch bowed; and shutting the door, as precisely and carefully as if he were not coming back for a week, went on his quest among the sparrows in the court. While he was gone, Mr Carker assumed his favourite attitude before the fire-place, and stood looking at the door; presenting, with his under lip tucked into the smile that showed his whole row of upper teeth, a singularly crouching apace.

The messenger was not long in returning, followed by a pair of heavy boots that came bumping along the passage like boxes. With the unceremonious words 'Come along with you!' - a very unusual form of introduction from his lips - Mr Perch then ushered into the presence a strong-built lad of fifteen, with a round red face, a round sleek head, round black eyes, round limbs, and round body, who, to carry out the general rotundity of his appearance, had a round hat in his hand, without a particle of brim to it.

Obedient to a nod from Mr Carker, Perch had no sooner confronted the visitor with that gentleman than he withdrew. The moment they were face to face alone, Mr Carker, without a word of preparation,

took him by the throat, and shook him until his head seemed loose upon his shoulders.

The boy, who in the midst of his astonishment could not help staring wildly at the gentleman with so many white teeth who was choking him, and at the office walls, as though determined, if he were choked, that his last look should be at the mysteries for his intrusion into which he was paying such a severe penalty, at last contrived to utter -

'Come, Sir! You let me alone, will you!'

'Let you alone!' said Mr Carker. 'What! I have got you, have I?' There was no doubt of that, and tightly too. 'You dog,' said Mr Carker, through his set jaws, 'I'll strangle you!'

Biler whimpered, would he though? oh no he wouldn't - and what was he doing of - and why didn't he strangle some- body of his own size and not him: but Biler was quelled by the extraordinary nature of his reception, and, as his head became stationary, and he looked the gentleman in the face, or rather in the teeth, and saw him snarling at him, he so far forgot his manhood as to cry.

'I haven't done nothing to you, Sir,' said Biler, otherwise Rob, otherwise Grinder, and always Toodle.

'You young scoundrel!' replied Mr Carker, slowly releasing him, and moving back a step into his favourite position. 'What do you mean by daring to come here?'

'I didn't mean no harm, Sir,' whimpered Rob, putting one hand to his throat, and the knuckles of the other to his eyes. 'I'll never come again, Sir. I only wanted work.'

'Work, young Cain that you are!' repeated Mr Carker, eyeing him narrowly. 'Ain't you the idlest vagabond in London?'

The impeachment, while it much affected Mr Toodle Junior, attached to his character so justly, that he could not say a word in denial. He stood looking at the gentleman, therefore, with a frightened, self-convicted, and remorseful air. As to his looking at him, it may be observed that he was fascinated by Mr Carker, and never took his round eyes off him for an instant.

'Ain't you a thief?' said Mr Carker, with his hands behind him in his pockets.

'No, sir,' pleaded Rob.

'You are!' said Mr Carker.

'I ain't indeed, Sir,' whimpered Rob. 'I never did such a thing as thieve, Sir, if you'll believe me. I know I've been a going wrong, Sir, ever since I took to bird-catching' and walking-matching. I'm sure a cove might think,' said Mr Toodle Junior, with a burst of penitence, 'that singing birds was innocent company, but nobody knows what harm is in them little creeturs and what they brings you down to.'

They seemed to have brought him down to a velveteen jacket and trousers very much the worse for wear, a particularly small red waistcoat like a gorget, an interval of blue check, and the hat before mentioned.

'I ain't been home twenty times since them birds got their will of me,' said Rob, 'and that's ten months. How can I go home when everybody's miserable to see me! I wonder,' said Biler, blubbering outright, and smearing his eyes with his coat-cuff, 'that I haven't been and drownded myself over and over again.'

All of which, including his expression of surprise at not having achieved this last scarce performance, the boy said, just as if the teeth of Mr Carker drew it out of him, and he had no power of concealing anything with that battery of attraction in full play.

'You're a nice young gentleman!' said Mr Carker, shaking his head at him. 'There's hemp-seed sown for you, my fine fellow!'

'I'm sure, Sir,' returned the wretched Biler, blubbering again, and again having recourse to his coat-cuff: 'I shouldn't care, sometimes, if it was growed too. My misfortunes all began in wagging, Sir; but what could I do, exceptin' wag?'

'Excepting what?' said Mr Carker.

'Wag, Sir. Wagging from school.'

'Do you mean pretending to go there, and not going?' said Mr Carker.

'Yes, Sir, that's wagging, Sir,' returned the quondam Grinder, much affected. 'I was chivied through the streets, Sir, when I went there, and pounded when I got there. So I wagged, and hid myself, and that began it.'

'And you mean to tell me,' said Mr Carker, taking him by the throat again, holding him out at arm's-length, and surveying him in silence for some moments, 'that you want a place, do you?'

'I should be thankful to be tried, Sir,' returned Toodle Junior, faintly.

Mr Carker the Manager pushed him backward into a corner - the boy submitting quietly, hardly venturing to breathe, and never once removing his eyes from his face - and rang the bell.

'Tell Mr Gills to come here.'

Mr Perch was too deferential to express surprise or recognition of the figure in the corner: and Uncle Sol appeared immediately.

'Mr Gills!' said Carker, with a smile, 'sit down. How do you do? You continue to enjoy your health, I hope?'

'Thank you, Sir,' returned Uncle Sol, taking out his pocket-book, and handing over some notes as he spoke. 'Nothing ails me in body but old age. Twenty-five, Sir.'

'You are as punctual and exact, Mr Gills,' replied the smiling Manager, taking a paper from one of his many drawers, and making an endorsement on it, while Uncle Sol looked over him, 'as one of your own chronometers. Quite right.'

'The Son and Heir has not been spoken, I find by the list, Sir,' said Uncle Sol, with a slight addition to the usual tremor in his voice.

'The Son and Heir has not been spoken,' returned Carker. 'There seems to have been tempestuous weather, Mr Gills, and she has probably been driven out of her course.'

'She is safe, I trust in Heaven!' said old Sol.

'She is safe, I trust in Heaven!' assented Mr Carker in that voiceless manner of his: which made the observant young Toodle tremble again. 'Mr Gills,' he added aloud, throwing himself back in his chair, 'you must miss your nephew very much?'

Uncle Sol, standing by him, shook his head and heaved a deep sigh.

'Mr Gills,' said Carker, with his soft hand playing round his mouth, and looking up into the Instrument-maker's face, 'it would be company to you to have a young fellow in your shop just now, and it would be obliging me if you would give one house-room for the present. No, to be sure,' he added quickly, in anticipation of what the old man was going to say, 'there's not much business doing there, I know; but you can make him clean the place out, polish up the instruments; drudge, Mr Gills. That's the lad!'

Sol Gills pulled down his spectacles from his forehead to his eyes, and looked at Toodle Junior standing upright in the corner: his head presenting the appearance (which it always did) of having been newly drawn out of a bucket of cold water; his small waistcoat rising and falling quickly in the play of his emotions; and his eyes intently fixed on Mr Carker, without the least reference to his proposed master.

'Will you give him house-room, Mr Gills?' said the Manager.

Old Sol, without being quite enthusiastic on the subject, replied that he was glad of any opportunity, however slight, to oblige Mr Carker, whose wish on such a point was a command: and that the wooden Midshipman would consider himself happy to receive in his berth any visitor of Mr Carker's selecting.

Mr Carker bared himself to the tops and bottoms of his gums: making the watchful Toodle Junior tremble more and more: and acknowledged the Instrument-maker's politeness in his most affable manner.

'I'll dispose of him so, then, Mr Gills,' he answered, rising, and shaking the old man by the hand, 'until I make up my mind what to do with him, and what he deserves. As I consider myself responsible for him, Mr Gills,' here he smiled a wide smile at Rob, who shook before it: 'I shall be glad if you'll look sharply after him, and report his behaviour to me. I'll ask a question or two of his parents as I ride home this afternoon - respectable people - to confirm some particulars in his own account of himself; and that done, Mr Gills, I'll send him round to you to-morrow morning. Goodbye!'

His smile at parting was so full of teeth, that it confused old Sol, and made him vaguely uncomfortable. He went home, thinking of raging seas, foundering ships, drowning men, an ancient bottle of Madeira never brought to light, and other dismal matters.

'Now, boy!' said Mr Carker, putting his hand on young Toodle's shoulder, and bringing him out into the middle of the room. 'You have heard me?'

Rob said, 'Yes, Sir.'

'Perhaps you understand,' pursued his patron, 'that if you ever deceive or play tricks with me, you had better have drowned yourself, indeed, once for all, before you came here?' There was nothing in any branch of mental acquisition that Rob seemed to understand better than that.

'If you have lied to me,' said Mr Carker, 'in anything, never come in my way again. If not, you may let me find you waiting for me somewhere

near your mother's house this afternoon. I shall leave this at five o'clock, and ride there on horseback. Now, give me the address.'

Rob repeated it slowly, as Mr Carker wrote it down. Rob even spelt it over a second time, letter by letter, as if he thought that the omission of a dot or scratch would lead to his destruction. Mr Carker then handed him out of the room; and Rob, keeping his round eyes fixed upon his patron to the last, vanished for the time being.

Mr Carker the Manager did a great deal of business in the course of the day, and stowed his teeth upon a great many people. In the office, in the court, in the street, and on 'Change, they glistened and bristled to a terrible extent. Five o'clock arriving, and with it Mr Carker's bay horse, they got on horseback, and went gleaming up Cheapside.

As no one can easily ride fast, even if inclined to do so, through the press and throng of the City at that hour, and as Mr Carker was not inclined, he went leisurely along, picking his way among the carts and carriages, avoiding whenever he could the wetter and more dirty places in the over-watered road, and taking infinite pains to keep himself and his steed clean. Glancing at the passersby while he was thus ambling on his way, he suddenly encountered the round eyes of the sleek-headed Rob intently fixed upon his face as if they had never been taken off, while the boy himself, with a pocket-handkerchief twisted up like a speckled eel and girded round his waist, made a very conspicuous demonstration of being prepared to attend upon him, at whatever pace he might think proper to go.

This attention, however flattering, being one of an unusual kind, and attracting some notice from the other passengers, Mr Carker took advantage of a clearer thoroughfare and a cleaner road, and broke into a trot. Rob immediately did the same. Mr Carker presently tried a canter; Rob was still in attendance. Then a short gallop; it was all one to the boy. Whenever Mr Carker turned his eyes to that side of the road, he still saw Toodle Junior holding his course, apparently without distress, and working himself along by the elbows after the most approved manner of professional gentlemen who get over the ground for wagers.

Ridiculous as this attendance was, it was a sign of an influence established over the boy, and therefore Mr Carker, affecting not to notice it, rode away into the neighbourhood of Mr Toodle's house. On his slackening his pace here, Rob appeared before him to point out the turnings; and when he called to a man at a neighbouring gateway to hold his horse, pending his visit to the buildings that had succeeded Staggs's Gardens, Rob dutifully held the stirrup, while the Manager dismounted.

'Now, Sir,' said Mr Carker, taking him by the shoulder, 'come along!'

The prodigal son was evidently nervous of visiting the parental abode; but Mr Carker pushing him on before, he had nothing for it but to open the right door, and suffer himself to be walked into the midst of his brothers and sisters, mustered in overwhelming force round the family tea-table. At sight of the prodigal in the grasp of a stranger, these tender relations united in a general howl, which smote upon the prodigal's breast so sharply when he saw his mother stand up among them, pale and trembling, with the baby in her arms, that he lent his own voice to the chorus.

Nothing doubting now that the stranger, if not Mr Ketch' in person, was one of that company, the whole of the young family wailed the louder, while its more infantine members, unable to control the transports of emotion appertaining to their time of life, threw themselves on their backs like young birds when terrified by a hawk, and kicked violently. At length, poor Polly making herself audible, said, with quivering lips, 'Oh Rob, my poor boy, what have you done at last!'

'Nothing, mother,' cried Rob, in a piteous voice, 'ask the gentleman!'

'Don't be alarmed,' said Mr Carker, 'I want to do him good.'

At this announcement, Polly, who had not cried yet, began to do so. The elder Toodles, who appeared to have been meditating a rescue, unclenched their fists. The younger Toodles clustered round their mother's gown, and peeped from under their own chubby arms at their desperado brother and his unknown friend. Everybody blessed the gentleman with the beautiful teeth, who wanted to do good.

'This fellow,' said Mr Carker to Polly, giving him a gentle shake, 'is your son, eh, Ma'am?'

'Yes, Sir,' sobbed Polly, with a curtsy; 'yes, Sir.'

'A bad son, I am afraid?' said Mr Carker.

'Never a bad son to me, Sir,' returned Polly.

'To whom then?' demanded Mr Carker.

'He has been a little wild, Sir,' returned Polly, checking the baby, who was making convulsive efforts with his arms and legs to launch himself on Biler, through the ambient air, 'and has gone with wrong companions: but I hope he has seen the misery of that, Sir, and will do well again.'

Mr Carker looked at Polly, and the clean room, and the clean children, and the simple Toodle face, combined of father and mother, that was reflected and repeated everywhere about him - and seemed to have achieved the real purpose of his visit.

'Your husband, I take it, is not at home?' he said.

'No, Sir,' replied Polly. 'He's down the line at present.'

The prodigal Rob seemed very much relieved to hear it: though still in the absorption of all his faculties in his patron, he hardly took his eyes from Mr Carker's face, unless for a moment at a time to steal a sorrowful glance at his mother.

'Then,' said Mr Carker, 'I'll tell you how I have stumbled on this boy of yours, and who I am, and what I am going to do for him.'

This Mr Carker did, in his own way; saying that he at first intended to have accumulated nameless terrors on his presumptuous head, for coming to the whereabouts of Dombey and Son. That he had relented, in consideration of his youth, his professed contrition, and his friends. That he was afraid he took a rash step in doing anything for the boy, and one that might expose him to the censure of the prudent; but that he did it of himself and for himself, and risked the consequences single-handed; and that his mother's past connexion with Mr Dombey's family had nothing to do with it, and that Mr Dombey had nothing to do with it, but that he, Mr Carker, was the be-all and the end-all of this business. Taking great credit to himself for his goodness, and receiving no less from all the family then present, Mr Carker signified, indirectly but still pretty plainly, that Rob's implicit fidelity, attachment, and devotion, were for evermore his due, and the least homage he could receive. And with this great truth Rob himself was so impressed, that, standing gazing on his patron with tears rolling down his cheeks, he nodded his shiny head until it seemed almost as loose as it had done under the same patron's hands that morning.

Polly, who had passed Heaven knows how many sleepless nights on account of this her dissipated firstborn, and had not seen him for weeks and weeks, could have almost kneeled to Mr Carker the Manager, as to a Good Spirit - in spite of his teeth. But Mr Carker rising to depart, she only thanked him with her mother's prayers and blessings; thanks so rich when paid out of the Heart's mint, especially for any service Mr Carker had rendered, that he might have given back a large amount of change, and yet been overpaid.

As that gentleman made his way among the crowding children to the door, Rob retreated on his mother, and took her and the baby in the same repentant hug.

'I'll try hard, dear mother, now. Upon my soul I will!' said Rob.

'Oh do, my dear boy! I am sure you will, for our sakes and your own!' cried Polly, kissing him. 'But you're coming back to speak to me, when you have seen the gentleman away?'

'I don't know, mother.' Rob hesitated, and looked down. 'Father - when's he coming home?'

'Not till two o'clock to-morrow morning.'

'I'll come back, mother dear!' cried Rob. And passing through the shrill cry of his brothers and sisters in reception of this promise, he followed Mr Carker out.

'What!' said Mr Carker, who had heard this. 'You have a bad father, have you?'

'No, Sir!' returned Rob, amazed. 'There ain't a better nor a kinder father going, than mine is.'

'Why don't you want to see him then?' inquired his patron.

'There's such a difference between a father and a mother, Sir,' said Rob, after faltering for a moment. 'He couldn't hardly believe yet that I was doing to do better - though I know he'd try to but a mother - she always believes what's,' good, Sir; at least I know my mother does, God bless her!'

Mr Carker's mouth expanded, but he said no more until he was mounted on his horse, and had dismissed the man who held it, when, looking down from the saddle steadily into the attentive and watchful face of the boy, he said:

'You'll come to me tomorrow morning, and you shall be shown where that old gentleman lives; that old gentleman who was with me this morning; where you are going, as you heard me say.'

'Yes, Sir,' returned Rob.

'I have a great interest in that old gentleman, and in serving him, you serve me, boy, do you understand? Well,' he added, interrupting him, for he saw his round face brighten when he was told that: 'I see you do. I want to know all about that old gentleman, and how he goes on

from day to day - for I am anxious to be of service to him - and especially who comes there to see him. Do you understand?'

Rob nodded his steadfast face, and said 'Yes, Sir,' again.

'I should like to know that he has friends who are attentive to him, and that they don't desert him - for he lives very much alone now, poor fellow; but that they are fond of him, and of his nephew who has gone abroad. There is a very young lady who may perhaps come to see him. I want particularly to know all about her.'

'I'll take care, Sir,' said the boy.

'And take care,' returned his patron, bending forward to advance his grinning face closer to the boy's, and pat him on the shoulder with the handle of his whip: 'take care you talk about affairs of mine to nobody but me.'

'To nobody in the world, Sir,' replied Rob, shaking his head.

'Neither there,' said Mr CarHer, pointing to the place they had just left, 'nor anywhere else. I'll try how true and grateful you can be. I'll prove you!' Making this, by his display of teeth and by the action of his head, as much a threat as a promise, he turned from Rob's eyes, which were nailed upon him as if he had won the boy by a charm, body and soul, and rode away. But again becoming conscious, after trotting a short distance, that his devoted henchman, girt as before, was yielding him the same attendance, to the great amusement of sundry spectators, he reined up, and ordered him off. To ensure his obedience, he turned in the saddle and watched him as he retired. It was curious to see that even then Rob could not keep his eyes wholly averted from his patron's face, but, constantly turning and turning again to look after him' involved himself in a tempest of buffetings and jostlings from the other passengers in the street: of which, in the pursuit of the one paramount idea, he was perfectly heedless.

Mr Carker the Manager rode on at a foot-pace, with the easy air of one who had performed all the business of the day in a satisfactory manner, and got it comfortably off his mind. Complacent and affable as man could be, Mr Carker picked his way along the streets and hummed a soft tune as he went He seemed to purr, he was so glad.

And in some sort, Mr Carker, in his fancy, basked upon a hearth too. Coiled up snugly at certain feet, he was ready for a spring, Or for a tear, or for a scratch, or for a velvet touch, as the humour took him and occasion served. Was there any bird in a cage, that came in for a share of his regards?

'A very young lady!' thought Mr Carker the Manager, through his song. 'Ay! when I saw her last, she was a little child. With dark eyes and hair, I recollect, and a good face; a very good face! I daresay she's pretty.'

More affable and pleasant yet, and humming his song until his many teeth vibrated to it, Mr Carker picked his way along, and turned at last into the shady street where Mr Dombey's house stood. He had been so busy, winding webs round good faces, and obscuring them with meshes, that he hardly thought of being at this point of his ride, until, glancing down the cold perspective of tall houses, he reined in his horse quickly within a few yards of the door. But to explain why Mr Carker reined in his horse quickly, and what he looked at in no small surprise, a few digressive words are necessary.

Mr Toots, emancipated from the Blimber thralldom and coming into the possession of a certain portion of his wordly wealth, 'which,' as he had been wont, during his last half-year's probation, to communicate to Mr Feeder every evening as a new discovery, 'the executors couldn't keep him out of' had applied himself with great diligence, to the science of Life. Fired with a noble emulation to pursue a brilliant and distinguished career, Mr Toots had furnished a choice set of apartments; had established among them a sporting bower, embellished with the portraits of winning horses, in which he took no particle of interest; and a divan, which made him poorly. In this delicious abode, Mr Toots devoted himself to the cultivation of those gentle arts which refine and humanise existence, his chief instructor in which was an interesting character called the Game Chicken, who was always to be heard of at the bar of the Black Badger, wore a shaggy white great-coat in the warmest weather, and knocked Mr Toots about the head three times a week, for the small consideration of ten and six per visit.

The Game Chicken, who was quite the Apollo of Mr Toots's Pantheon, had introduced to him a marker who taught billiards, a Life Guard who taught fencing, a jobmaster who taught riding, a Cornish gentleman who was up to anything in the athletic line, and two or three other friends connected no less intimately with the fine arts. Under whose auspices Mr Toots could hardly fail to improve apace, and under whose tuition he went to work.

But however it came about, it came to pass, even while these gentlemen had the gloss of novelty upon them, that Mr Toots felt, he didn't know how, unsettled and uneasy. There were husks in his corn, that even Game Chickens couldn't peck up; gloomy giants in his leisure, that even Game Chickens couldn't knock down. Nothing seemed to do Mr Toots so much good as incessantly leaving cards at Mr Dombey's door. No taxgatherer in the British Dominions - that

wide-spread territory on which the sun never sets, and where the tax-gatherer never goes to bed - was more regular and persevering in his calls than Mr Toots.

Mr Toots never went upstairs; and always performed the same ceremonies, richly dressed for the purpose, at the hall door.

'Oh! Good morning!' would be Mr Toots's first remark to the servant. 'For Mr Dombey,' would be Mr Toots's next remark, as he handed in a card. 'For Miss Dombey,' would be his next, as he handed in another.

Mr Toots would then turn round as if to go away; but the man knew him by this time, and knew he wouldn't.

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' Mr Toots would say, as if a thought had suddenly descended on him. 'Is the young woman at home?'

The man would rather think she was; but wouldn't quite know. Then he would ring a bell that rang upstairs, and would look up the staircase, and would say, yes, she was at home, and was coming down. Then Miss Nipper would appear, and the man would retire.

'Oh! How de do?' Mr Toots would say, with a chuckle and a blush.

Susan would thank him, and say she was very well.

'How's Diogenes going on?' would be Mr Toots's second interrogation.

Very well indeed. Miss Florence was fonder and fonder of him every day. Mr Toots was sure to hail this with a burst of chuckles, like the opening of a bottle of some effervescent beverage.

'Miss Florence is quite well, Sir,' Susan would add.

Oh, it's of no consequence, thank'ee,' was the invariable reply of Mr Toots; and when he had said so, he always went away very fast.

Now it is certain that Mr Toots had a filmy something in his mind, which led him to conclude that if he could aspire successfully in the fulness of time, to the hand of Florence, he would be fortunate and blest. It is certain that Mr Toots, by some remote and roundabout road, had got to that point, and that there he made a stand. His heart was wounded; he was touched; he was in love. He had made a desperate attempt, one night, and had sat up all night for the purpose, to write an acrostic on Florence, which affected him to tears in the conception. But he never proceeded in the execution further than the words 'For when I gaze,' - the flow of imagination in which he

had previously written down the initial letters of the other seven lines, deserting him at that point.

Beyond devising that very artful and politic measure of leaving a card for Mr Dombey daily, the brain of Mr Toots had not worked much in reference to the subject that held his feelings prisoner. But deep consideration at length assured Mr Toots that an important step to gain, was, the conciliation of Miss Susan Nipper, preparatory to giving her some inkling of his state of mind.

A little light and playful gallantry towards this lady seemed the means to employ in that early chapter of the history, for winning her to his interests. Not being able quite to make up his mind about it, he consulted the Chicken - without taking that gentleman into his confidence; merely informing him that a friend in Yorkshire had written to him (Mr Toots) for his opinion on such a question. The Chicken replying that his opinion always was, 'Go in and win,' and further, 'When your man's before you and your work cut out, go in and do it,' Mr Toots considered this a figurative way of supporting his own view of the case, and heroically resolved to kiss Miss Nipper next day.

Upon the next day, therefore, Mr Toots, putting into requisition some of the greatest marvels that Burgess and Co. had ever turned out, went off to Mr Dotnbey's upon this design. But his heart failed him so much as he approached the scene of action, that, although he arrived on the ground at three o'clock in the afternoon, it was six before he knocked at the door.

Everything happened as usual, down to the point where Susan said her young mistress was well, and Mr Toots said it was of no consequence. To her amazement, Mr Toots, instead of going off, like a rocket, after that observation, lingered and chuckled.

'Perhaps you'd like to walk upstairs, Sir!' said Susan.

'Well, I think I will come in!' said Mr Toots.

But instead of walking upstairs, the bold Toots made an awkward plunge at Susan when the door was shut, and embracing that fair creature, kissed her on the cheek

'Go along with you!~ cried Susan, 'or Ill tear your eyes out.'

'Just another!' said Mr Toots.

'Go along with you!' exclaimed Susan, giving him a push 'Innocents like you, too! Who'll begin next? Go along, Sir!'

Susan was not in any serious strait, for she could hardly speak for laughing; but Diogenes, on the staircase, hearing a rustling against the wall, and a shuffling of feet, and seeing through the banisters that there was some contention going on, and foreign invasion in the house, formed a different opinion, dashed down to the rescue, and in the twinkling of an eye had Mr Toots by the leg.

Susan screamed, laughed, opened the street-door, and ran downstairs; the bold Toots tumbled staggering out into the street, with Diogenes holding on to one leg of his pantaioons, as if Burgess and Co. were his cooks, and had provided that dainty morsel for his holiday entertainment; Diogenes shaken off, rolled over and over in the dust, got up' again, whirled round the giddy Toots and snapped at him: and all this turmoil Mr Carker, reigning up his horse and sitting a little at a distance, saw to his amazement, issue from the stately house of Mr Dombey.

Mr Carker remained watching the discomfited Toots, when Diogenes was called in, and the door shut: and while that gentleman, taking refuge in a doorway near at hand, bound up the torn leg of his pantaloons with a costly silk handkerchief that had formed part of his expensive outfit for the advent

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Mr Carker, riding up, with his most propitiatory smile. 'I hope you are not hurt?'

'Oh no, thank you,' replied Mr Toots, raising his flushed face, 'it's of no consequence' Mr Toots would have signified, if he could, that he liked it very much.

'If the dog's teeth have entered the leg, Sir - ' began Carker, with a display of his own'

'No, thank you,' said Mr Toots, 'it's all quite right. It's very comfortable, thank you.'

'I have the pleasure of knowing Mr Dombey,' observed Carker.

'Have you though?' rejoined the blushing Took

'And you will allow me, perhaps, to apologise, in his absence,' said Mr Carker, taking off his hat, 'for such a misadventure, and to wonder how it can possibly have happened.'

Mr Toots is so much gratified by this politeness, and the lucky chance of making friends with a friend of Mr Dombey, that he pulls out his card-case which he never loses an opportunity of using, and hands

his name and address to Mr Carker: who responds to that courtesy by giving him his own, and with that they part.

As Mr Carker picks his way so softly past the house, looking up at the windows, and trying to make out the pensive face behind the curtain looking at the children opposite, the rough head of Diogenes came clambering up close by it, and the dog, regardless of all soothing, barks and growls, and makes at him from that height, as if he would spring down and tear him limb from limb.

Well spoken, Di, so near your Mistress! Another, and another with your head up, your eyes flashing, and your vexed mouth worrying itself, for want of him! Another, as he picks his way along! You have a good scent, Di, - cats, boy, cats!