

Chapter XXVI - Shadows Of The Past And Future

'Your most obedient, Sir,' said the Major. 'Damme, Sir, a friend of my friend Dombey's is a friend of mine, and I'm glad to see you!'

'I am infinitely obliged, Carker,' explained Mr Dombey, 'to Major Bagstock, for his company and conversation. Major Bagstock has rendered me great service, Carker.'

Mr Carker the Manager, hat in hand, just arrived at Leamington, and just introduced to the Major, showed the Major his whole double range of teeth, and trusted he might take the liberty of thanking him with all his heart for having effected so great an Improvement in Mr Dombey's looks and spirits'

'By Gad, Sir,' said the Major, in reply, 'there are no thanks due to me, for it's a give and take affair. A great creature like our friend Dombey, Sir,' said the Major, lowering his voice, but not lowering it so much as to render it inaudible to that gentleman, 'cannot help improving and exalting his friends. He strengthens and invigorates a man, Sir, does Dombey, in his moral nature.'

Mr Carker snapped at the expression. In his moral nature. Exactly. The very words he had been on the point of suggesting.

'But when my friend Dombey, Sir,' added the Major, 'talks to you of Major Bagstock, I must crave leave to set him and you right. He means plain Joe, Sir - Joey B. - Josh. Bagstock - Joseph- rough and tough Old J., Sir. At your service.'

Mr Carker's excessively friendly inclinations towards the Major, and Mr Carker's admiration of his roughness, toughness, and plainness, gleamed out of every tooth in Mr Carker's head.

'And now, Sir,' said the Major, 'you and Dombey have the devil's own amount of business to talk over.'

'By no means, Major,' observed Mr Dombey.

'Dombey,' said the Major, defiantly, 'I know better; a man of your mark - the Colossus of commerce - is not to be interrupted. Your moments are precious. We shall meet at dinner-time. In the interval, old Joseph will be scarce. The dinner-hour is a sharp seven, Mr Carker.'

With that, the Major, greatly swollen as to his face, withdrew; but immediately putting in his head at the door again, said:

'I beg your pardon. Dombey, have you any message to 'em?'

Mr Dombey in some embarrassment, and not without a glance at the courteous keeper of his business confidence, entrusted the Major with his compliments.

'By the Lord, Sir,' said the Major, 'you must make it something warmer than that, or old Joe will be far from welcome.'

'Regards then, if you will, Major,' returned Mr Dombey.

'Damme, Sir,' said the Major, shaking his shoulders and his great cheeks jocularly: 'make it something warmer than that.'

'What you please, then, Major,' observed Mr Dombey.

'Our friend is sly, Sir, sly, Sir, de-vilish sly,' said the Major, staring round the door at Carker. 'So is Bagstock.' But stopping in the midst of a chuckle, and drawing himself up to his full height, the Major solemnly exclaimed, as he struck himself on the chest, 'Dombey! I envy your feelings. God bless you!' and withdrew.

'You must have found the gentleman a great resource,' said Carker, following him with his teeth.

'Very great indeed,' said Mr Dombey.

'He has friends here, no doubt,' pursued Carker. 'I perceive, from what he has said, that you go into society here. Do you know,' smiling horribly, 'I am so very glad that you go into society!'

Mr Dombey acknowledged this display of interest on the part of his second in command, by twirling his watch-chain, and slightly moving his head.

'You were formed for society,' said Carker. 'Of all the men I know, you are the best adapted, by nature and by position, for society. Do you know I have been frequently amazed that you should have held it at arm's length so long!'

'I have had my reasons, Carker. I have been alone, and indifferent to it. But you have great social qualifications yourself, and are the more likely to have been surprised.'

'Oh! I!' returned the other, with ready self-disparagement. 'It's quite another matter in the case of a man like me. I don't come into comparison with you.'

Mr Dombey put his hand to his neckcloth, settled his chin in it, coughed, and stood looking at his faithful friend and servant for a few moments in silence.

'I shall have the pleasure, Carker,' said Mr Dombey at length: making as if he swallowed something a little too large for his throat: 'to present you to my - to the Major's friends. Highly agreeable people.'

'Ladies among them, I presume?' insinuated the smooth Manager.

'They are all - that is to say, they are both - ladies,' replied Mr Dombey.

'Only two?' smiled Carker.

'They are only two. I have confined my visits to their residence, and have made no other acquaintance here.'

'Sisters, perhaps?' quoth Carker.

'Mother and daughter,' replied Mr Dombey.

As Mr Dombey dropped his eyes, and adjusted his neckcloth again, the smiling face of Mr Carker the Manager became in a moment, and without any stage of transition, transformed into a most intent and frowning face, scanning his closely, and with an ugly sneer. As Mr Dombey raised his eyes, it changed back, no less quickly, to its old expression, and showed him every gum of which it stood possessed.

'You are very kind,' said Carker, 'I shall be delighted to know them. Speaking of daughters, I have seen Miss Dombey.'

There was a sudden rush of blood to Mr Dombey's face.

'I took the liberty of waiting on her,' said Carker, 'to inquire if she could charge me with any little commission. I am not so fortunate as to be the bearer of any but her - but her dear love.'

Wolf's face that it was then, with even the hot tongue revealing itself through the stretched mouth, as the eyes encountered Mr Dombey's!

'What business intelligence is there?' inquired the latter gentleman, after a silence, during which Mr Carker had produced some memoranda and other papers.

'There is very little,' returned Carker. 'Upon the whole we have not had our usual good fortune of late, but that is of little moment to you. At

Lloyd's, they give up the Son and Heir for lost. Well, she was insured, from her keel to her masthead.'

'Carker,' said Mr Dombey, taking a chair near him, 'I cannot say that young man, Gay, ever impressed me favourably

'Nor me,' interposed the Manager.

'But I wish,' said Mr Dombey, without heeding the interruption, 'he had never gone on board that ship. I wish he had never been sent out.

'It is a pity you didn't say so, in good time, is it not?' retorted Carker, coolly. 'However, I think it's all for the best. I really, think it's all for the best. Did I mention that there was something like a little confidence between Miss Dombey and myself?'

'No,' said Mr Dombey, sternly.

'I have no doubt,' returned Mr Carker, after an impressive pause, 'that wherever Gay is, he is much better where he is, than at home here. If I were, or could be, in your place, I should be satisfied of that. I am quite satisfied of it myself. Miss Dombey is confiding and young - perhaps hardly proud enough, for your daughter - if she have a fault. Not that that is much though, I am sure. Will you check these balances with me?'

Mr Dombey leaned back in his chair, instead of bending over the papers that were laid before him, and looked the Manager steadily in the face. The Manager, with his eyelids slightly raised, affected to be glancing at his figures, and to await the leisure of his principal. He showed that he affected this, as if from great delicacy, and with a design to spare Mr Dombey's feelings; and the latter, as he looked at him, was cognizant of his intended consideration, and felt that but for it, this confidential Carker would have said a great deal more, which he, Mr Dombey, was too proud to ask for. It was his way in business, often. Little by little, Mr Dombey's gaze relaxed, and his attention became diverted to the papers before him; but while busy with the occupation they afforded him, he frequently stopped, and looked at Mr Carker again. Whenever he did so, Mr Carker was demonstrative, as before, in his delicacy, and impressed it on his great chief more and more.

While they were thus engaged; and under the skilful culture of the Manager, angry thoughts in reference to poor Florence brooded and bred in Mr Dombey's breast, usurping the place of the cold dislike that generally reigned there; Major Bagstock, much admired by the old ladies of Leamington, and followed by the Native, carrying the usual amount of light baggage, straddled along the shady side of the

way, to make a morning call on Mrs Skewton. It being midday when the Major reached the bower of Cleopatra, he had the good fortune to find his Princess on her usual sofa, languishing over a cup of coffee, with the room so darkened and shaded for her more luxurious repose, that Withers, who was in attendance on her, loomed like a phantom page.

'What insupportable creature is this, coming in?' said Mrs Skewton, 'I cannot hear it. Go away, whoever you are!'

'You have not the heart to banish J. B., Ma'am!' said the Major halting midway, to remonstrate, with his cane over his shoulder.

'Oh it's you, is it? On second thoughts, you may enter,' observed Cleopatra.

The Major entered accordingly, and advancing to the sofa pressed her charming hand to his lips.

'Sit down,' said Cleopatra, listlessly waving her fan, 'a long way off. Don't come too near me, for I am frightfully faint and sensitive this morning, and you smell of the Sun. You are absolutely tropical.'

'By George, Ma'am,' said the Major, 'the time has been when Joseph Bagstock has been grilled and blistered by the Sun; then time was, when he was forced, Ma'am, into such full blow, by high hothouse heat in the West Indies, that he was known as the Flower. A man never heard of Bagstock, Ma'am, in those days; he heard of the Flower - the Flower of Ours. The Flower may have faded, more or less, Ma'am,' observed the Major, dropping into a much nearer chair than had been indicated by his cruel Divinity, 'but it is a tough plant yet, and constant as the evergreen.'

Here the Major, under cover of the dark room, shut up one eye, rolled his head like a Harlequin, and, in his great self-satisfaction, perhaps went nearer to the confines of apoplexy than he had ever gone before.

'Where is Mrs Granger?' inquired Cleopatra of her page.

Withers believed she was in her own room.

'Very well,' said Mrs Skewton. 'Go away, and shut the door. I am engaged.'

As Withers disappeared, Mrs Skewton turned her head languidly towards the Major, without otherwise moving, and asked him how his friend was.

'Dombey, Ma'am,' returned the Major, with a facetious gurgling in his throat, 'is as well as a man in his condition can be. His condition is a desperate one, Ma'am. He is touched, is Dombey! Touched!' cried the Major. 'He is bayoneted through the body.'

Cleopatra cast a sharp look at the Major, that contrasted forcibly with the affected drawl in which she presently said:

'Major Bagstock, although I know but little of the world, - nor can I really regret my experience, for I fear it is a false place, full of withering conventionalities: where Nature is but little regarded, and where the music of the heart, and the gushing of the soul, and all that sort of thing, which is so truly poetical, is seldom heard, - I cannot misunderstand your meaning. There is an allusion to Edith - to my extremely dear child,' said Mrs Skewton, tracing the outline of her eyebrows with her forefinger, 'in your words, to which the tenderest of chords vibrates excessively.'

'Bluntness, Ma'am,' returned the Major, 'has ever been the characteristic of the Bagstock breed. You are right. Joe admits it.'

'And that allusion,' pursued Cleopatra, 'would involve one of the most - if not positively the most - touching, and thrilling, and sacred emotions of which our sadly-fallen nature is susceptible, I conceive.'

The Major laid his hand upon his lips, and wafted a kiss to Cleopatra, as if to identify the emotion in question.

'I feel that I am weak. I feel that I am wanting in that energy, which should sustain a Mama: not to say a parent: on such a subject,' said Mrs Skewton, trimming her lips with the laced edge of her pocket-handkerchief; 'but I can hardly approach a topic so excessively momentous to my dearest Edith without a feeling of faintness. Nevertheless, bad man, as you have boldly remarked upon it, and as it has occasioned me great anguish:' Mrs Skewton touched her left side with her fan: 'I will not shrink from my duty.'

The Major, under cover of the dimness, swelled, and swelled, and rolled his purple face about, and winked his lobster eye, until he fell into a fit of wheezing, which obliged him to rise and take a turn or two about the room, before his fair friend could proceed.

'Mr Dombey,' said Mrs Skewton, when she at length resumed, 'was obliging enough, now many weeks ago, to do us the honour of visiting us here; in company, my dear Major, with yourself. I acknowledge - let me be open - that it is my failing to be the creature of impulse, and to wear my heart as it were, outside. I know my failing full well. My enemy cannot know it better. But I am not penitent; I would rather

not be frozen by the heartless world, and am content to bear this imputation justly.'

Mrs Skewton arranged her tucker, pinched her wiry throat to give it a soft surface, and went on, with great complacency.

'It gave me (my dearest Edith too, I am sure) infinite pleasure to receive Mr Dombey. As a friend of yours, my dear Major, we were naturally disposed to be prepossessed in his favour; and I fancied that I observed an amount of Heart in Mr Dombey, that was excessively refreshing.'

'There is devilish little heart in Dombey now, Ma'am,' said the Major.

'Wretched man!' cried Mrs Skewton, looking at him languidly, 'pray be silent.'

'J. B. is dumb, Ma'am,' said the Major.

'Mr Dombey,' pursued Cleopatra, smoothing the rosy hue upon her cheeks, 'accordingly repeated his visit; and possibly finding some attraction in the simplicity and primitiveness of our tastes - for there is always a charm in nature - it is so very sweet - became one of our little circle every evening. Little did I think of the awful responsibility into which I plunged when I encouraged Mr Dombey - to -

'To beat up these quarters, Ma'am,' suggested Major Bagstock.

'Coarse person!' said Mrs Skewton, 'you anticipate my meaning, though in odious language.'

Here Mrs Skewton rested her elbow on the little table at her side, and suffering her wrist to droop in what she considered a graceful and becoming manner, dangled her fan to and fro, and lazily admired her hand while speaking.

'The agony I have endured,' she said mincingly, 'as the truth has by degrees dawned upon me, has been too exceedingly terrific to dilate upon. My whole existence is bound up in my sweetest Edith; and to see her change from day to day - my beautiful pet, who has positively garnered up her heart since the death of that most delightful creature, Granger - is the most affecting thing in the world.'

Mrs Skewton's world was not a very trying one, if one might judge of it by the influence of its most affecting circumstance upon her; but this by the way.

'Edith,' simpered Mrs Skewton, 'who is the perfect pearl of my life, is said to resemble me. I believe we are alike.'

'There is one man in the world who never will admit that anyone resembles you, Ma'am,' said the Major; 'and that man's name is Old Joe Bagstock.'

Cleopatra made as if she would brain the flatterer with her fan, but relenting, smiled upon him and proceeded:

'If my charming girl inherits any advantages from me, wicked one!': the Major was the wicked one: 'she inherits also my foolish nature. She has great force of character - mine has been said to be immense, though I don't believe it - but once moved, she is susceptible and sensitive to the last extent. What are my feelings when I see her pining! They destroy me.'

The Major advancing his double chin, and pursing up his blue lips into a soothing expression, affected the profoundest sympathy.

'The confidence,' said Mrs Skewton, 'that has subsisted between us - the free development of soul, and openness of sentiment - is touching to think of. We have been more like sisters than Mama and child.'

'J. B.'s own sentiment,' observed the Major, 'expressed by J. B. fifty thousand times!'

'Do not interrupt, rude man!' said Cleopatra. 'What are my feelings, then, when I find that there is one subject avoided by us! That there is a what's-his-name - a gulf - opened between us. That my own artless Edith is changed to me! They are of the most poignant description, of course.'

The Major left his chair, and took one nearer to the little table.

'From day to day I see this, my dear Major,' proceeded Mrs Skewton. 'From day to day I feel this. From hour to hour I reproach myself for that excess of faith and trustfulness which has led to such distressing consequences; and almost from minute to minute, I hope that Mr Dombey may explain himself, and relieve the torture I undergo, which is extremely wearing. But nothing happens, my dear Major; I am the slave of remorse - take care of the coffee-cup: you are so very awkward - my darling Edith is an altered being; and I really don't see what is to be done, or what good creature I can advise with.'

Major Bagstock, encouraged perhaps by the softened and confidential tone into which Mrs Skewton, after several times lapsing into it for a

moment, seemed now to have subsided for good, stretched out his hand across the little table, and said with a leer,

'Advise with Joe, Ma'am.'

'Then, you aggravating monster,' said Cleopatra, giving one hand to the Major, and tapping his knuckles with her fan, which she held in the other: 'why don't you talk to me? you know what I mean. Why don't you tell me something to the purpose?'

The Major laughed, and kissed the hand she had bestowed upon him, and laughed again immensely.

'Is there as much Heart in Mr Dombey as I gave him credit for?' languished Cleopatra tenderly. 'Do you think he is in earnest, my dear Major? Would you recommend his being spoken to, or his being left alone? Now tell me, like a dear man, what would you advise.'

'Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, Ma'am?' chuckled the Major, hoarsely.

'Mysterious creature!' returned Cleopatra, bringing her fan to bear upon the Major's nose. 'How can we marry him?'

'Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, Ma'am, I say?' chuckled the Major again.

Mrs Skewton returned no answer in words, but smiled upon the Major with so much archness and vivacity, that that gallant officer considering himself challenged, would have imprinted a kiss on her exceedingly red lips, but for her interposing the fan with a very winning and juvenile dexterity. It might have been in modesty; it might have been in apprehension of some danger to their bloom.

'Dombey, Ma'am,' said the Major, 'is a great catch.'

'Oh, mercenary wretch!' cried Cleopatra, with a little shriek, 'I am shocked.'

'And Dombey, Ma'am,' pursued the Major, thrusting forward his head, and distending his eyes, 'is in earnest. Joseph says it; Bagstock knows it; J. B. keeps him to the mark. Leave Dombey to himself, Ma'am. Dombey is safe, Ma'am. Do as you have done; do no more; and trust to J. B. for the end.'

'You really think so, my dear Major?' returned Cleopatra, who had eyed him very cautiously, and very searchingly, in spite of her listless bearing.

'Sure of it, Ma'am,' rejoined the Major. 'Cleopatra the peerless, and her Antony Bagstock, will often speak of this, triumphantly, when sharing the elegance and wealth of Edith Dombey's establishment. Dombey's right-hand man, Ma'am,' said the Major, stopping abruptly in a chuckle, and becoming serious, 'has arrived.'

'This morning?' said Cleopatra.

'This morning, Ma'am,' returned the Major. 'And Dombey's anxiety for his arrival, Ma'am, is to be referred - take J. B.'s word for this; for Joe is devilish sly' - the Major tapped his nose, and screwed up one of his eyes tight: which did not enhance his native beauty - 'to his desire that what is in the wind should become known to him' without Dombey's telling and consulting him. For Dombey is as proud, Ma'am,' said the Major, 'as Lucifer.'

'A charming quality,' lisped Mrs Skewton; 'reminding one of dearest Edith.'

'Well, Ma'am,' said the Major. 'I have thrown out hints already, and the right-hand man understands 'em; and I'll throw out more, before the day is done. Dombey projected this morning a ride to Warwick Castle, and to Kenilworth, to-morrow, to be preceded by a breakfast with us. I undertook the delivery of this invitation. Will you honour us so far, Ma'am?' said the Major, swelling with shortness of breath and slyness, as he produced a note, addressed to the Honourable Mrs Skewton, by favour of Major Bagstock, wherein hers ever faithfully, Paul Dombey, besought her and her amiable and accomplished daughter to consent to the proposed excursion; and in a postscript unto which, the same ever faithfully Paul Dombey entreated to be recalled to the remembrance of Mrs Granger.

'Hush!' said Cleopatra, suddenly, 'Edith!'

The loving mother can scarcely be described as resuming her insipid and affected air when she made this exclamation; for she had never cast it off; nor was it likely that she ever would or could, in any other place than in the grave. But hurriedly dismissing whatever shadow of earnestness, or faint confession of a purpose, laudable or wicked, that her face, or voice, or manner: had, for the moment, betrayed, she lounged upon the couch, her most insipid and most languid self again, as Edith entered the room.

Edith, so beautiful and stately, but so cold and so repelling. Who, slightly acknowledging the presence of Major Bagstock, and directing a keen glance at her mother, drew back the from a window, and sat down there, looking out.

'My dearest Edith,' said Mrs Skewton, 'where on earth have you been? I have wanted you, my love, most sadly.'

'You said you were engaged, and I stayed away,' she answered, without turning her head.

'It was cruel to Old Joe, Ma'am,' said the Major in his gallantry.

'It was very cruel, I know,' she said, still looking out - and said with such calm disdain, that the Major was discomfited, and could think of nothing in reply.

'Major Bagstock, my darling Edith,' drawled her mother, 'who is generally the most useless and disagreeable creature in the world: as you know - '

'It is surely not worthwhile, Mama,' said Edith, looking round, 'to observe these forms of speech. We are quite alone. We know each other.'

The quiet scorn that sat upon her handsome face - a scorn that evidently lighted on herself, no less than them - was so intense and deep, that her mother's simper, for the instant, though of a hardy constitution, drooped before it.

'My darling girl,' she began again.

'Not woman yet?' said Edith, with a smile.

'How very odd you are to-day, my dear! Pray let me say, my love, that Major Bagstock has brought the kindest of notes from Mr Dombey, proposing that we should breakfast with him to-morrow, and ride to Warwick and Kenilworth. Will you go, Edith?'

'Will I go!' she repeated, turning very red, and breathing quickly as she looked round at her mother.

'I knew you would, my own, observed the latter carelessly. 'It is, as you say, quite a form to ask. Here is Mr Dombey's letter, Edith.'

'Thank you. I have no desire to read it,' was her answer.

'Then perhaps I had better answer it myself,' said Mrs Skewton, 'though I had thought of asking you to be my secretary, darling.' As Edith made no movement, and no answer, Mrs Skewton begged the Major to wheel her little table nearer, and to set open the desk it contained, and to take out pen and paper for her; all which congenial

offices of gallantry the Major discharged, with much submission and devotion.

'Your regards, Edith, my dear?' said Mrs Skewton, pausing, pen in hand, at the postscript.

'What you will, Mama,' she answered, without turning her head, and with supreme indifference.

Mrs Skewton wrote what she would, without seeking for any more explicit directions, and handed her letter to the Major, who receiving it as a precious charge, made a show of laying it near his heart, but was fain to put it in the pocket of his pantaloons on account of the insecurity of his waistcoat. The Major then took a very polished and chivalrous farewell of both ladies, which the elder one acknowledged in her usual manner, while the younger, sitting with her face addressed to the window, bent her head so slightly that it would have been a greater compliment to the Major to have made no sign at all, and to have left him to infer that he had not been heard or thought of.

'As to alteration in her, Sir,' mused the Major on his way back; on which expedition - the afternoon being sunny and hot - he ordered the Native and the light baggage to the front, and walked in the shadow of that expatriated prince: 'as to alteration, Sir, and pining, and so forth, that won't go down with Joseph Bagstock, None of that, Sir. It won't do here. But as to there being something of a division between 'em - or a gulf as the mother calls it - damme, Sir, that seems true enough. And it's odd enough! Well, Sir!' panted the Major, 'Edith Granger and Dombey are well matched; let 'em fight it out! Bagstock backs the winner!'

The Major, by saying these latter words aloud, in the vigour of his thoughts, caused the unhappy Native to stop, and turn round, in the belief that he was personally addressed. Exasperated to the last degree by this act of insubordination, the Major (though he was swelling with enjoyment of his own humour, at the moment of its occurrence instantly thrust his cane among the Native's ribs, and continued to stir him up, at short intervals, all the way to the hotel.

Nor was the Major less exasperated as he dressed for dinner, during which operation the dark servant underwent the pelting of a shower of miscellaneous objects, varying in size from a boot to a hairbrush, and including everything that came within his master's reach. For the Major plumed himself on having the Native in a perfect state of drill, and visited the least departure from strict discipline with this kind of fatigue duty. Add to this, that he maintained the Native about his person as a counter-irritant against the gout, and all other vexations,

mental as well as bodily; and the Native would appear to have earned his pay - which was not large.

At length, the Major having disposed of all the missiles that were convenient to his hand, and having called the Native so many new names as must have given him great occasion to marvel at the resources of the English language, submitted to have his cravat put on; and being dressed, and finding himself in a brisk flow of spirits after this exercise, went downstairs to enliven 'Dombey' and his right-hand man.

Dombey was not yet in the room, but the right-hand man was there, and his dental treasures were, as usual, ready for the Major.

'Well, Sir!' said the Major. 'How have you passed the time since I had the happiness of meeting you? Have you walked at all?'

'A saunter of barely half an hour's duration,' returned Carker. 'We have been so much occupied.'

'Business, eh?' said the Major.

'A variety of little matters necessary to be gone through,' replied Carker. 'But do you know - this is quite unusual with me, educated in a distrustful school, and who am not generally disposed to be communicative,' he said, breaking off, and speaking in a charming tone of frankness - 'but I feel quite confidential with you, Major Bagstock.'

'You do me honour, Sir,' returned the Major. 'You may be.'

'Do you know, then,' pursued Carker, 'that I have not found my friend - our friend, I ought rather to call him - '

'Meaning Dombey, Sir?' cried the Major. 'You see me, Mr Carker, standing here! J. B.?'

He was puffy enough to see, and blue enough; and Mr Carker intimated that he had that pleasure.

'Then you see a man, Sir, who would go through fire and water to serve Dombey,' returned Major Bagstock.

Mr Carker smiled, and said he was sure of it. 'Do you know, Major,' he proceeded: 'to resume where I left off that I have not found our friend so attentive to business today, as usual?'

'No?' observed the delighted Major.

'I have found him a little abstracted, and with his attention disposed to wander,' said Carker.

'By Jove, Sir,' cried the Major, 'there's a lady in the case.'

'Indeed, I begin to believe there really is,' returned Carker; 'I thought you might be jesting when you seemed to hint at it; for I know you military men -

The Major gave the horse's cough, and shook his head and shoulders, as much as to say, 'Well! we are gay dogs, there's no denying.' He then seized Mr Carker by the button-hole, and with starting eyes whispered in his ear, that she was a woman of extraordinary charms, Sir. That she was a young widow, Sir. That she was of a fine family, Sir. That Dombey was over head and ears in love with her, Sir, and that it would be a good match on both sides; for she had beauty, blood, and talent, and Dombey had fortune; and what more could any couple have? Hearing Mr Dombey's footsteps without, the Major cut himself short by saying, that Mr Carker would see her tomorrow morning, and would judge for himself; and between his mental excitement, and the exertion of saying all this in wheezy whispers, the Major sat gurgling in the throat and watering at the eyes, until dinner was ready.

The Major, like some other noble animals, exhibited himself to great advantage at feeding-time. On this occasion, he shone resplendent at one end of the table, supported by the milder lustre of Mr Dombey at the other; while Carker on one side lent his ray to either light, or suffered it to merge into both, as occasion arose.

During the first course or two, the Major was usually grave; for the Native, in obedience to general orders, secretly issued, collected every sauce and cruet round him, and gave him a great deal to do, in taking out the stoppers, and mixing up the contents in his plate. Besides which, the Native had private zests and flavours on a side-table, with which the Major daily scorched himself; to say nothing of strange machines out of which he spirited unknown liquids into the Major's drink. But on this occasion, Major Bagstock, even amidst these many occupations, found time to be social; and his sociality consisted in excessive slyness for the behoof of Mr Carker, and the betrayal of Mr Dombey's state of mind.

'Dombey,' said the Major, 'you don't eat; what's the matter?'

'Thank you,' returned the gentleman, 'I am doing very well; I have no great appetite today.'

'Why, Dombey, what's become of it?' asked the Major. 'Where's it gone? You haven't left it with our friends, I'll swear, for I can answer

for their having none to-day at luncheon. I can answer for one of 'em, at least: I won't say which.'

Then the Major winked at Carker, and became so frightfully sly, that his dark attendant was obliged to pat him on the back, without orders, or he would probably have disappeared under the table. In a later stage of the dinner: that is to say, when the Native stood at the Major's elbow ready to serve the first bottle of champagne: the Major became still slyer.

'Fill this to the brim, you scoundrel,' said the Major, holding up his glass. 'Fill Mr Carker's to the brim too. And Mr Dombey's too. By Gad, gentlemen,' said the Major, winking at his new friend, while Mr Dombey looked into his plate with a conscious air, 'we'll consecrate this glass of wine to a Divinity whom Joe is proud to know, and at a distance humbly and reverently to admire. Edith,' said the Major, 'is her name; angelic Edith!'

'To angelic Edith!' cried the smiling Carker.

'Edith, by all means,' said Mr Dombey.

The entrance of the waiters with new dishes caused the Major to be slyer yet, but in a more serious vein. 'For though among ourselves, Joe Bagstock mingles jest and earnest on this subject, Sir,' said the Major, laying his finger on his lips, and speaking half apart to Carker, 'he holds that name too sacred to be made the property of these fellows, or of any fellows. Not a word!, Sir' while they are here!'

This was respectful and becoming on the Major's part, and Mr Dombey plainly felt it so. Although embarrassed in his own frigid way, by the Major's allusions, Mr Dombey had no objection to such rallying, it was clear, but rather courted it. Perhaps the Major had been pretty near the truth, when he had divined that morning that the great man who was too haughty formally to consult with, or confide in his prime minister, on such a matter, yet wished him to be fully possessed of it. Let this be how it may, he often glanced at Mr Carker while the Major plied his light artillery, and seemed watchful of its effect upon him.

But the Major, having secured an attentive listener, and a smiler who had not his match in all the world - 'in short, a devilish intelligent and able fellow,' as he often afterwards declared - was not going to let him off with a little slyness personal to Mr Dombey. Therefore, on the removal of the cloth, the Major developed himself as a choice spirit in the broader and more comprehensive range of narrating regimental stories, and cracking regimental jokes, which he did with such prodigal exuberance, that Carker was (or feigned to be) quite

exhausted with laughter and admiration: while Mr Dombey looked on over his starched cravat, like the Major's proprietor, or like a stately showman who was glad to see his bear dancing well.

When the Major was too hoarse with meat and drink, and the display of his social powers, to render himself intelligible any longer, they adjourned to coffee. After which, the Major inquired of Mr Carker the Manager, with little apparent hope of an answer in the affirmative, if he played picquet.

'Yes, I play picquet a little,' said Mr Carker.

'Backgammon, perhaps?' observed the Major, hesitating.

'Yes, I play backgammon a little too,' replied the man of teeth.

'Carker plays at all games, I believe,' said Mr Dombey, laying himself on a sofa like a man of wood, without a hinge or a joint in him; 'and plays them well.'

In sooth, he played the two in question, to such perfection, that the Major was astonished, and asked him, at random, if he played chess.

'Yes, I play chess a little,' answered Carker. 'I have sometimes played, and won a game - it's a mere trick - without seeing the board.'

'By Gad, Sir!' said the Major, staring, 'you are a contrast to Dombey, who plays nothing.'

'Oh! He!' returned the Manager. 'He has never had occasion to acquire such little arts. To men like me, they are sometimes useful. As at present, Major Bagstock, when they enable me to take a hand with you.'

It might be only the false mouth, so smooth and wide; and yet there seemed to lurk beneath the humility and subserviency of this short speech, a something like a snarl; and, for a moment, one might have thought that the white teeth were prone to bite the hand they fawned upon. But the Major thought nothing about it; and Mr Dombey lay meditating with his eyes half shut, during the whole of the play, which lasted until bed-time.

By that time, Mr Carker, though the winner, had mounted high into the Major's good opinion, insomuch that when he left the Major at his own room before going to bed, the Major as a special attention, sent the Native - who always rested on a mattress spread upon the ground at his master's door - along the gallery, to light him to his room in state.

There was a faint blur on the surface of the mirror in Mr Carker's chamber, and its reflection was, perhaps, a false one. But it showed, that night, the image of a man, who saw, in his fancy, a crowd of people slumbering on the ground at his feet, like the poor Native at his master's door: who picked his way among them: looking down, maliciously enough: but trod upon no upturned face - as yet.