Chapter XXVII - Deeper Shadows

Mr Carker the Manager rose with the lark, and went out, walking in the summer day. His meditations - and he meditated with contracted brows while he strolled along - hardly seemed to soar as high as the lark, or to mount in that direction; rather they kept close to their nest upon the earth, and looked about, among the dust and worms. But there was not a bird in the air, singing unseen, farther beyond the reach of human eye than Mr Carker's thoughts. He had his face so perfectly under control, that few could say more, in distinct terms, of its expression, than that it smiled or that it pondered. It pondered now, intently. As the lark rose higher, he sank deeper in thought. As the lark poured out her melody clearer and stronger, he fell into a graver and profounder silence. At length, when the lark came headlong down, with an accumulating stream of song, and dropped among the green wheat near him, rippling in the breath of the morning like a river, he sprang up from his reverie, and looked round with a sudden smile, as courteous and as soft as if he had had numerous observers to propitiate; nor did he relapse, after being thus awakened; but clearing his face, like one who bethought himself that it might otherwise wrinkle and tell tales, went smiling on, as if for practice.

Perhaps with an eye to first impressions, Mr Carker was very carefully and trimly dressed, that morning. Though always somewhat formal, in his dress, in imitation of the great man whom he served, he stopped short of the extent of Mr Dombey's stiffness: at once perhaps because he knew it to be ludicrous, and because in doing so he found another means of expressing his sense of the difference and distance between them. Some people quoted him indeed, in this respect, as a pointed commentary, and not a flattering one, on his icy patron - but the world is prone to misconstruction, and Mr Carker was not accountable for its bad propensity.

Clean and florid: with his light complexion, fading as it were, in the sun, and his dainty step enhancing the softness of the turf: Mr Carker the Manager strolled about meadows, and green lanes, and glided among avenues of trees, until it was time to return to breakfast. Taking a nearer way back, Mr Carker pursued it, airing his teeth, and said aloud as he did so, 'Now to see the second Mrs Dombey!'

He had strolled beyond the town, and re-entered it by a pleasant walk, where there was a deep shade of leafy trees, and where there were a few benches here and there for those who chose to rest. It not being a place of general resort at any hour, and wearing at that time of the still morning the air of being quite deserted and retired, Mr Carker had it, or thought he had it, all to himself. So, with the whim of an idle man, to whom there yet remained twenty minutes for reaching a

destination easily able in ten, Mr Carker threaded the great boles of the trees, and went passing in and out, before this one and behind that, weaving a chain of footsteps on the dewy ground.

But he found he was mistaken in supposing there was no one in the grove, for as he softly rounded the trunk of one large tree, on which the obdurate bark was knotted and overlapped like the hide of a rhinoceros or some kindred monster of the ancient days before the Flood, he saw an unexpected figure sitting on a bench near at hand, about which, in another moment, he would have wound the chain he was making.

It was that of a lady, elegantly dressed and very handsome, whose dark proud eyes were fixed upon the ground, and in whom some passion or struggle was raging. For as she sat looking down, she held a corner of her under lip within her mouth, her bosom heaved, her nostril quivered, her head trembled, indignant tears were on her cheek, and her foot was set upon the moss as though she would have crushed it into nothing. And yet almost the self-same glance that showed him this, showed him the self-same lady rising with a scornful air of weariness and lassitude, and turning away with nothing expressed in face or figure but careless beauty and imperious disdain.

A withered and very ugly old woman, dressed not so much like a gipsy as like any of that medley race of vagabonds who tramp about the country, begging, and stealing, and tinkering, and weaving rushes, by turns, or all together, had been observing the lady, too; for, as she rose, this second figure strangely confronting the first, scrambled up from the ground - out of it, it almost appeared - and stood in the way.

'Let me tell your fortune, my pretty lady,' said the old woman, munching with her jaws, as if the Death's Head beneath her yellow skin were impatient to get out.

'I can tell it for myself,' was the reply.

'Ay, ay, pretty lady; but not right. You didn't tell it right when you were sitting there. I see you! Give me a piece of silver, pretty lady, and I'll tell your fortune true. There's riches, pretty lady, in your face.'

'I know,' returned the lady, passing her with a dark smile, and a proud step. 'I knew it before.

'What! You won't give me nothing?' cried the old woman. 'You won't give me nothing to tell your fortune, pretty lady? How much will you give me to tell it, then? Give me something, or I'll call it after you!' croaked the old woman, passionately.

Mr Carker, whom the lady was about to pass close, slinking against his tree as she crossed to gain the path, advanced so as to meet her, and pulling off his hat as she went by, bade the old woman hold her peace. The lady acknowledged his interference with an inclination of the head, and went her way.

'You give me something then, or I'll call it after her!' screamed the old woman, throwing up her arms, and pressing forward against his outstretched hand. 'Or come,' she added, dropping her voice suddenly, looking at him earnestly, and seeming in a moment to forget the object of her wrath, 'give me something, or I'll call it after you! '

'After me, old lady!' returned the Manager, putting his hand in his pocket.

'Yes,' said the woman, steadfast in her scrutiny, and holding out her shrivelled hand. 'I know!'

'What do you know?' demanded Carker, throwing her a shilling. 'Do you know who the handsome lady is?'

Munching like that sailor's wife of yore, who had chestnuts In her lap, and scowling like the witch who asked for some in vain, the old woman picked the shilling up, and going backwards, like a crab, or like a heap of crabs: for her alternately expanding and contracting hands might have represented two of that species, and her creeping face, some half-a-dozen more: crouched on the veinous root of an old tree, pulled out a short black pipe from within the crown of her bonnet, lighted it with a match, and smoked in silence, looking fixedly at her questioner.

Mr Carker laughed, and turned upon his heel.

'Good!' said the old woman. 'One child dead, and one child living: one wife dead, and one wife coming. Go and meet her!'

In spite of himself, the Manager looked round again, and stopped. The old woman, who had not removed her pipe, and was munching and mumbling while she smoked, as if in conversation with an invisible familiar, pointed with her finger in the direction he was going, and laughed.

'What was that you said, Beldamite?' he demanded.

The woman mumbled, and chattered, and smoked, and still pointed before him; but remained silent Muttering a farewell that was not complimentary, Mr Carker pursued his way; but as he turned out of that place, and looked over his shoulder at the root of the old tree, he

could yet see the finger pointing before him, and thought he heard the woman screaming, 'Go and meet her!'

Preparations for a choice repast were completed, he found, at the hotel; and Mr Dombey, and the Major, and the breakfast, were awaiting the ladies. Individual constitution has much to do with the development of such facts, no doubt; but in this case, appetite carried it hollow over the tender passion; Mr Dombey being very cool and collected, and the Major fretting and fuming in a state of violent heat and irritation. At length the door was thrown open by the Native, and, after a pause, occupied by her languishing along the gallery, a very blooming, but not very youthful lady, appeared.

'My dear Mr Dombey,' said the lady, 'I am afraid we are late, but Edith has been out already looking for a favourable point of view for a sketch, and kept me waiting for her. Falsest of Majors,' giving him her little finger, 'how do you do?'

'Mrs Skewton,' said Mr Dombey, 'let me gratify my friend Carker:' Mr Dombey unconsciously emphasised the word friend, as saying 'no really; I do allow him to take credit for that distinction:' 'by presenting him to you. You have heard me mention Mr Carker.'

'I am charmed, I am sure,' said Mrs Skewton, graciously.

Mr Carker was charmed, of course. Would he have been more charmed on Mr Dombey's behalf, if Mrs Skewton had been (as he at first supposed her) the Edith whom they had toasted overnight?

'Why, where, for Heaven's sake, is Edith?' exclaimed Mrs Skewton, looking round. 'Still at the door, giving Withers orders about the mounting of those drawings! My dear Mr Dombey, will you have the kindness -

Mr Dombey was already gone to seek her. Next moment he returned, bearing on his arm the same elegantly dressed and very handsome lady whom Mr Carker had encountered underneath the trees.

'Carker - ' began Mr Dombey. But their recognition of each other was so manifest, that Mr Dombey stopped surprised.

'I am obliged to the gentleman,' said Edith, with a stately bend, 'for sparing me some annoyance from an importunate beggar just now.'

'I am obliged to my good fortune,' said Mr Carker, bowing low, 'for the opportunity of rendering so slight a service to one whose servant I am proud to be.'

As her eye rested on him for an instant, and then lighted on the ground, he saw in its bright and searching glance a suspicion that he had not come up at the moment of his interference, but had secretly observed her sooner. As he saw that, she saw in his eye that her distrust was not without foundation.

'Really,' cried Mrs Skewton, who had taken this opportunity of inspecting Mr Carker through her glass, and satisfying herself (as she lisped audibly to the Major) that he was all heart; 'really now, this is one of the most enchanting coincidences that I ever heard of. The idea! My dearest Edith, there is such an obvious destiny in it, that really one might almost be induced to cross one's arms upon one's frock, and say, like those wicked Turks, there is no What's-his-name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet!'

Edith designed no revision of this extraordinary quotation from the Koran, but Mr Dombey felt it necessary to offer a few polite remarks.

'It gives me great pleasure,' said Mr Dombey, with cumbrous gallantry, 'that a gentleman so nearly connected with myself as Carker is, should have had the honour and happiness of rendering the least assistance to Mrs Granger.' Mr Dombey bowed to her. 'But it gives me some pain, and it occasions me to be really envious of Carker;' he unconsciously laid stress on these words, as sensible that they must appear to involve a very surprising proposition; 'envious of Carker, that I had not that honour and that happiness myself.' Mr Dombey bowed again. Edith, saving for a curl of her lip, was motionless.

'By the Lord, Sir,' cried the Major, bursting into speech at sight of the waiter, who was come to announce breakfast, 'it's an extraordinary thing to me that no one can have the honour and happiness of shooting all such beggars through the head without being brought to book for it. But here's an arm for Mrs Granger if she'll do J. B. the honour to accept it; and the greatest service Joe can render you, Ma'am, just now, is, to lead you into table!'

With this, the Major gave his arm to Edith; Mr Dombey led the way with Mrs Skewton; Mrs Carker went last, smiling on the party.

'I am quite rejoiced, Mr Carker,' said the lady-mother, at breakfast, after another approving survey of him through her glass, 'that you have timed your visit so happily, as to go with us to-day. It is the most enchanting expedition!'

'Any expedition would be enchanting in such society,' returned Carker; 'but I believe it is, in itself, full of interest.'

'Oh!' cried Mrs Skewton, with a faded little scream of rapture, 'the Castle is charming! - associations of the Middle Ages - and all that - which is so truly exquisite. Don't you dote upon the Middle Ages, Mr Carker?'

'Very much, indeed,' said Mr Carker.

'Such charming times!' cried Cleopatra. 'So full of faith! So vigorous and forcible! So picturesque! So perfectly removed from commonplace! Oh dear! If they would only leave us a little more of the poetry of existence in these terrible days!'

Mrs Skewton was looking sharp after Mr Dombey all the time she said this, who was looking at Edith: who was listening, but who never lifted up her eyes.

'We are dreadfully real, Mr Carker,' said Mrs Skewton; 'are we not?'

Few people had less reason to complain of their reality than Cleopatra, who had as much that was false about her as could well go to the composition of anybody with a real individual existence. But Mr Carker commiserated our reality nevertheless, and agreed that we were very hardly used in that regard.

'Pictures at the Castle, quite divine!' said Cleopatra. 'I hope you dote upon pictures?'

'I assure you, Mrs Skewton,' said Mr Dombey, with solemn encouragement of his Manager, 'that Carker has a very good taste for pictures; quite a natural power of appreciating them. He is a very creditable artist himself. He will be delighted, I am sure, with Mrs Granger's taste and skill.'

'Damme, Sir!' cried Major Bagstock, 'my opinion is, that you're the admirable Carker, and can do anything.'

'Oh!' smiled Carker, with humility, 'you are much too sanguine, Major Bagstock. I can do very little. But Mr Dombey is so generous in his estimation of any trivial accomplishment a man like myself may find it almost necessary to acquire, and to which, in his very different sphere, he is far superior, that - ' Mr Carker shrugged his shoulders, deprecating further praise, and said no more.

All this time, Edith never raised her eyes, unless to glance towards her mother when that lady's fervent spirit shone forth in words. But as Carker ceased, she looked at Mr Dombey for a moment. For a moment only; but with a transient gleam of scornful wonder on her face, not lost on one observer, who was smiling round the board.

Mr Dombey caught the dark eyelash in its descent, and took the opportunity of arresting it.

'You have been to Warwick often, unfortunately?' said Mr Dombey.

'Several times.'

'The visit will be tedious to you, I am afraid.'

'Oh no; not at all.'

'Ah! You are like your cousin Feenix, my dearest Edith,' said Mrs Skewton. 'He has been to Warwick Castle fifty times, if he has been there once; yet if he came to Leamington to-morrow - I wish he would, dear angel! - he would make his fifty-second visit next day.'

'We are all enthusiastic, are we not, Mama?' said Edith, with a cold smile.

'Too much so, for our peace, perhaps, my dear,' returned her mother; 'but we won't complain. Our own emotions are our recompense. If, as your cousin Feenix says, the sword wears out the what's-its-name

'The scabbard, perhaps,' said Edith.

'Exactly - a little too fast, it is because it is bright and glowing, you know, my dearest love.'

Mrs Skewton heaved a gentle sigh, supposed to cast a shadow on the surface of that dagger of lath, whereof her susceptible bosom was the sheath: and leaning her head on one side, in the Cleopatra manner, looked with pensive affection on her darling child.

Edith had turned her face towards Mr Dombey when he first addressed her, and had remained in that attitude, while speaking to her mother, and while her mother spoke to her, as though offering him her attention, if he had anything more to say. There was something in the manner of this simple courtesy: almost defiant, and giving it the character of being rendered on compulsion, or as a matter of traffic to which she was a reluctant party again not lost upon that same observer who was smiling round the board. It set him thinking of her as he had first seen her, when she had believed herself to be alone among the trees.

Mr Dombey having nothing else to say, proposed - the breakfast being now finished, and the Major gorged, like any Boa Constrictor - that they should start. A barouche being in waiting, according to the orders of that gentleman, the two ladies, the Major and himself, took

their seats in it; the Native and the wan page mounted the box, Mr Towlinson being left behind; and Mr Carker, on horseback, brought up the rear. Mr Carker cantered behind the carriage. at the distance of a hundred yards or so, and watched it, during all the ride, as if he were a cat, indeed, and its four occupants, mice. Whether he looked to one side of the road, or to the other - over distant landscape, with its smooth undulations, wind-mills, corn, grass, bean fields, wild-flowers, farm-yards, hayricks, and the spire among the wood - or upwards in the sunny air, where butterflies were sporting round his head, and birds were pouring out their songs - or downward, where the shadows of the branches interlaced, and made a trembling carpet on the road - or onward, where the overhanging trees formed aisles and arches, dim with the softened light that steeped through leaves - one corner of his eye was ever on the formal head of Mr Dombey, addressed towards him, and the feather in the bonnet, drooping so neglectfully and scornfully between them; much as he had seen the haughty eyelids droop; not least so, when the face met that now fronting it. Once, and once only, did his wary glance release these objects; and that was, when a leap over a low hedge, and a gallop across a field, enabled him to anticipate the carriage coming by the road, and to be standing ready, at the journey's end, to hand the ladies out. Then, and but then, he met her glance for an instant in her first surprise; but when he touched her, in alighting, with his soft white hand, it overlooked him altogether as before.

Mrs Skewton was bent on taking charge of Mr Carker herself, and showing him the beauties of the Castle. She was determined to have his arm, and the Major's too. It would do that incorrigible creature: who was the most barbarous infidel in point of poetry: good to be in such company. This chance arrangement left Mr Dombey at liberty to escort Edith: which he did: stalking before them through the apartments with a gentlemanly solemnity.

'Those darling byegone times, Mr Carker,' said Cleopatra, 'with their delicious fortresses, and their dear old dungeons, and their delightful places of torture, and their romantic vengeances, and their picturesque assaults and sieges, and everything that makes life truly charming! How dreadfully we have degenerated!'

'Yes, we have fallen off deplorably,' said Mr Carker.

The peculiarity of their conversation was, that Mrs Skewton, in spite of her ecstasies, and Mr Carker, in spite of his urbanity, were both intent on watching Mr Dombey and Edith. With all their conversational endowments, they spoke somewhat distractedly, and at random, in consequence.

'We have no Faith left, positively,' said Mrs Skewton, advancing her shrivelled ear; for Mr Dombey was saying something to Edith. 'We have no Faith in the dear old Barons, who were the most delightful creatures - or in the dear old Priests, who were the most warlike of men - or even in the days of that inestimable Queen Bess, upon the wall there, which were so extremely golden. Dear creature! She was all Heart And that charming father of hers! I hope you dote on Harry the Eighth!'

'I admire him very much,' said Carker.

'So bluff!' cried Mrs Skewton, 'wasn't he? So burly. So truly English. Such a picture, too, he makes, with his dear little peepy eyes, and his benevolent chin!'

'Ah, Ma'am!' said Carker, stopping short; 'but if you speak of pictures, there's a composition! What gallery in the world can produce the counterpart of that?'

As the smiling gentleman thus spake, he pointed through a doorway to where Mr Dombey and Edith were standing alone in the centre of another room.

They were not interchanging a word or a look. Standing together, arm in arm, they had the appearance of being more divided than if seas had rolled between them. There was a difference even in the pride of the two, that removed them farther from each other, than if one had been the proudest and the other the humblest specimen of humanity in all creation. He, self-important, unbending, formal, austere. She, lovely and graceful, in an uncommon degree, but totally regardless of herself and him and everything around, and spurning her own attractions with her haughty brow and lip, as if they were a badge or livery she hated. So unmatched were they, and opposed, so forced and linked together by a chain which adverse hazard and mischance had forged: that fancy might have imagined the pictures on the walls around them, startled by the unnatural conjunction, and observant of it in their several expressions. Grim knights and warriors looked scowling on them. A churchman, with his hand upraised, denounced the mockery of such a couple coming to God's altar. Quiet waters in landscapes, with the sun reflected in their depths, asked, if better means of escape were not at hand, was there no drowning left? Ruins cried, 'Look here, and see what We are, wedded to uncongenial Time!' Animals, opposed by nature, worried one another, as a moral to them. Loves and Cupids took to flight afraid, and Martyrdom had no such torment in its painted history of suffering.

Nevertheless, Mrs Skewton was so charmed by the sight to which Mr Carker invoked her attention, that she could not refraIn from saying,

half aloud, how sweet, how very full of soul it was! Edith, overhearing, looked round, and flushed indignant scarlet to her hair.

'My dearest Edith knows I was admiring her!' said Cleopatra, tapping her, almost timidly, on the back with her parasol. 'Sweet pet!'

Again Mr Carker saw the strife he had witnessed so unexpectedly among the trees. Again he saw the haughty languor and indifference come over it, and hide it like a cloud.

She did not raise her eyes to him; but with a slight peremptory motion of them, seemed to bid her mother come near. Mrs Skewton thought it expedient to understand the hint, and advancing quickly, with her two cavaliers, kept near her daughter from that time,

Mr Carker now, having nothing to distract his attention, began to discourse upon the pictures and to select the best, and point them out to Mr Dombey: speaking with his usual familiar recognition of Mr Dombey's greatness, and rendering homage by adjusting his eye-glass for him, or finding out the right place in his catalogue, or holding his stick, or the like. These services did not so much originate with Mr Carker, in truth, as with Mr Dombey himself, who was apt to assert his chieftainship by saying, with subdued authority, and in an easy way - for him - 'Here, Carker, have the goodness to assist me, will you?' which the smiling gentleman always did with pleasure.

They made the tour of the pictures, the walls, crow's nest, and so forth; and as they were still one little party, and the Major was rather in the shade: being sleepy during the process of digestion: Mr Carker became communicative and agreeable. At first, he addressed himself for the most part to Mrs Skewton; but as that sensitive lady was in such ecstasies with the works of art, after the first quarter of an hour, that she could do nothing but yawn (they were such perfect inspirations, she observed as a reason for that mark of rapture), he transferred his attentions to Mr Dombey. Mr Dombey said little beyond an occasional 'Very true, Carker,' or 'Indeed, Carker,' but he tacitly encouraged Carker to proceed, and inwardly approved of his behaviour very much: deeming it as well that somebody should talk, and thinking that his remarks, which were, as one might say, a branch of the parent establishment, might amuse Mrs Granger. Mr Carker, who possessed an excellent discretion, never took the liberty of addressing that lady, direct; but she seemed to listen, though she never looked at him; and once or twice, when he was emphatic in his peculiar humility, the twilight smile stole over her face, not as a light, but as a deep black shadow.

Warwick Castle being at length pretty well exhausted, and the Major very much so: to say nothing of Mrs Skewton, whose peculiar

demonstrations of delight had become very frequent Indeed: the carriage was again put In requisition, and they rode to several admired points of view In the neighbourhood. Mr Dombey ceremoniously observed of one of these, that a sketch, however slight, from the fair hand of Mrs Granger, would be a remembrance to him of that agreeable day: though he wanted no artificial remembrance, he was sure (here Mr Dombey made another of his bows), which he must always highly value. Withers the lean having Edith's sketch-book under his arm, was immediately called upon by Mrs Skewton to produce the same: and the carriage stopped, that Edith might make the drawing, which Mr Dombey was to put away among his treasures.

'But I am afraid I trouble you too much,' said Mr Dombey.

'By no means. Where would you wish it taken from?' she answered, turning to him with the same enforced attention as before.

Mr Dombey, with another bow, which cracked the starch in his cravat, would beg to leave that to the Artist.

'I would rather you chose for yourself,' said Edith.

'Suppose then,' said Mr Dombey, 'we say from here. It appears a good spot for the purpose, or - Carker, what do you think?'

There happened to be in the foreground, at some little distance, a grove of trees, not unlike that In which Mr Carker had made his chain of footsteps in the morning, and with a seat under one tree, greatly resembling, in the general character of its situation, the point where his chain had broken.

'Might I venture to suggest to Mrs Granger,' said Carker, 'that that is an interesting - almost a curious - point of view?'

She followed the direction of his riding-whip with her eyes, and raised them quickly to his face. It was the second glance they had exchanged since their introduction; and would have been exactly like the first, but that its expression was plainer.

'Will you like that?' said Edith to Mr Dombey.

'I shall be charmed,' said Mr Dombey to Edith.

Therefore the carriage was driven to the spot where Mr Dombey was to be charmed; and Edith, without moving from her seat, and openIng her sketch-book with her usual proud indifference, began to sketch.

'My pencils are all pointless,' she said, stopping and turning them over.

'Pray allow me,' said Mr Dombey. 'Or Carker will do it better, as he understands these things. Carker, have the goodness to see to these pencils for Mrs Granger.

Mr Carker rode up close to the carriage-door on Mrs Granger's side, and letting the rein fall on his horse's neck, took the pencils from her hand with a smile and a bow, and sat in the saddle leisurely mending them. Having done so, he begged to be allowed to hold them, and to hand them to her as they were required; and thus Mr Carker, with many commendations of Mrs Granger's extraordinary skill - especially in trees - remained - close at her side, looking over the drawing as she made it. Mr Dombey in the meantime stood bolt upright in the carriage like a highly respectable ghost, looking on too; while Cleopatra and the Major dallied as two ancient doves might do.

'Are you satisfied with that, or shall I finish it a little more?' said Edith, showing the sketch to Mr Dombey.

Mr Dombey begged that it might not be touched; it was perfection.

'It is most extraordinary,' said Carker, bringing every one of his red gums to bear upon his praise. 'I was not prepared for anything so beautiful, and so unusual altogether.'

This might have applied to the sketcher no less than to the sketch; but Mr Carker's manner was openness itself - not as to his mouth alone, but as to his whole spirit. So it continued to be while the drawing was laid aside for Mr Dombey, and while the sketching materials were put up; then he handed in the pencils (which were received with a distant acknowledgment of his help, but without a look), and tightening his rein, fell back, and followed the carriage again.

Thinking, perhaps, as he rode, that even this trivial sketch had been made and delivered to its owner, as if it had been bargained for and bought. Thinking, perhaps, that although she had assented with such perfect readiness to his request, her haughty face, bent over the drawing, or glancing at the distant objects represented in it, had been the face of a proud woman, engaged in a sordid and miserable transaction. Thinking, perhaps, of such things: but smiling certainly, and while he seemed to look about him freely, in enjoyment of the air and exercise, keeping always that sharp corner of his eye upon the carriage.

A stroll among the haunted ruins of Kenilworth, and more rides to more points of view: most of which, Mrs Skewton reminded Mr Dombey, Edith had already sketched, as he had seen in looking over her drawings: brought the day's expedition to a close. Mrs Skewton and Edith were driven to their own lodgings; Mr Carker was graciously invited by Cleopatra to return thither with Mr Dombey and the Major, in the evening, to hear some of Edith's music; and the three gentlemen repaired to their hotel to dinner.

The dinner was the counterpart of yesterday's, except that the Major was twenty-four hours more triumphant and less mysterious. Edith was toasted again. Mr Dombey was again agreeably embarrassed. And Mr Carker was full of interest and praise.

There were no other visitors at Mrs Skewton's. Edith's drawings were strewn about the room, a little more abundantly than usual perhaps; and Withers, the wan page, handed round a little stronger tea. The harp was there; the piano was there; and Edith sang and played. But even the music was played by Edith to Mr Dombey's order, as it were, in the same uncompromising way. As thus.

'Edith, my dearest love,' said Mrs Skewton, half an hour after tea, 'Mr Dombey is dying to hear you, I know.'

'Mr Dombey has life enough left to say so for himself, Mama, I have no doubt.'

'I shall be immensely obliged,' said Mr Dombey.

'What do you wish?'

'Piano?' hesitated Mr Dombey.

'Whatever you please. You have only to choose.

Accordingly, she began with the piano. It was the same with the harp; the same with her singing; the same with the selection of the pieces that she sang and played. Such frigid and constrained, yet prompt and pointed acquiescence with the wishes he imposed upon her, and on no one else, was sufficiently remarkable to penetrate through all the mysteries of picquet, and impress itself on Mr Carker's keen attention. Nor did he lose sight of the fact that Mr Dombey was evidently proud of his power, and liked to show it.

Nevertheless, Mr Carker played so well - some games with the Major, and some with Cleopatra, whose vigilance of eye in respect of Mr Dombey and Edith no lynx could have surpassed - that he even heightened his position in the lady-mother's good graces; and when on

taking leave he regretted that he would be obliged to return to London next morning, Cleopatra trusted: community of feeling not being met with every day: that it was far from being the last time they would meet.

'I hope so,' said Mr Carker, with an expressive look at the couple in the distance, as he drew towards the door, following the Major. 'I think so.'

Mr Dombey, who had taken a stately leave of Edith, bent, or made some approach to a bend, over Cleopatra's couch, and said, in a low voice:

'I have requested Mrs Granger's permission to call on her to-morrow morning - for a purpose - and she has appointed twelve o'clock. May I hope to have the pleasure of finding you at home, Madam, afterwards?'

Cleopatra was so much fluttered and moved, by hearing this, of course, incomprehensible speech, that she could only shut her eyes, and shake her head, and give Mr Dombey her hand; which Mr Dombey, not exactly knowing what to do with, dropped.

'Dombey, come along!' cried the Major, looking in at the door. 'Damme, Sir, old Joe has a great mind to propose an alteration in the name of the Royal Hotel, and that it should be called the Three Jolly Bachelors, in honour of ourselves and Carker.' With this, the Major slapped Mr Dombey on the back, and winking over his shoulder at the ladies, with a frightful tendency of blood to the head, carried him off.

Mrs Skewton reposed on her sofa, and Edith sat apart, by her harp, in silence. The mother, trifling with her fan, looked stealthily at the daughter more than once, but the daughter, brooding gloomily with downcast eyes, was not to be disturbed.

Thus they remained for a long hour, without a word, until Mrs Skewton's maid appeared, according to custom, to prepare her gradually for night. At night, she should have been a skeleton, with dart and hour-glass, rather than a woman, this attendant; for her touch was as the touch of Death. The painted object shrivelled underneath her hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eyebrows changed to scanty tufts of grey; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's place, huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown.

The very voice was changed, as it addressed Edith, when they were alone again.

'Why don't you tell me,' it said sharply, 'that he is coming here to-morrow by appointment?'

'Because you know it,' returned Edith, 'Mother.'

The mocking emphasis she laid on that one word!

'You know he has bought me,' she resumed. 'Or that he will, to-morrow. He has considered of his bargain; he has shown it to his friend; he is even rather proud of it; he thinks that it will suit him, and may be had sufficiently cheap; and he will buy to-morrow. God, that I have lived for this, and that I feel it!'

Compress into one handsome face the conscious self-abasement, and the burning indignation of a hundred women, strong in passion and in pride; and there it hid itself with two white shuddering arms.

'What do you mean?' returned the angry mother. 'Haven't you from a child - '

'A child!' said Edith, looking at her, 'when was I a child? What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman - artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men - before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt You gave birth to a woman. Look upon her. She is in her pride tonight'

And as she spoke, she struck her hand upon her beautiful bosom, as though she would have beaten down herself

'Look at me,' she said, 'who have never known what it is to have an honest heart, and love. Look at me, taught to scheme and plot when children play; and married in my youth - an old age of design - to one for whom I had no feeling but indifference. Look at me, whom he left a widow, dying before his inheritance descended to him - a judgment on you! well deserved! - and tell me what has been my life for ten years since.'

'We have been making every effort to endeavour to secure to you a good establishment,' rejoined her mother. 'That has been your life. And now you have got it.'

'There is no slave in a market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years,' cried Edith, with a burning brow, and the same bitter emphasis on the one word. 'Is it not so? Have I been made the bye-word of all kinds of men? Have fools, have profligates, have boys, have dotards, dangled after me, and one by one rejected me, and

fallen off, because you were too plain with all your cunning: yes, and too true, with all those false pretences: until we have almost come to be notorious? The licence of look and touch,' she said, with flashing eyes, 'have I submitted to it, in half the places of resort upon the map of England? Have I been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me, and I loathe myself? Has been my late childhood? I had none before. Do not tell me that I had, tonight of all nights in my life!'

'You might have been well married,' said her mother, 'twenty times at least, Edith, if you had given encouragement enough.'

'No! Who takes me, refuse that I am, and as I well deserve to be,' she answered, raising her head, and trembling in her energy of shame and stormy pride, 'shall take me, as this man does, with no art of mine put forth to lure him. He sees me at the auction, and he thinks it well to buy me. Let him! When he came to view me - perhaps to bid - he required to see the roll of my accomplishments. I gave it to him. When he would have me show one of them, to justify his purchase to his men, I require of him to say which he demands, and I exhibit it. I will do no more. He makes the purchase of his own will, and with his own sense of its worth, and the power of his money; and I hope it may never disappoint him. I have not vaunted and pressed the bargain; neither have you, so far as I have been able to prevent you.

'You talk strangely to-night, Edith, to your own Mother.'

'It seems so to me; stranger to me than you,' said Edith. 'But my education was completed long ago. I am too old now, and have fallen too low, by degrees, to take a new course, and to stop yours, and to help myself. The germ of all that purifies a woman's breast, and makes it true and good, has never stirred in mine, and I have nothing else to sustain me when I despise myself.' There had been a touching sadness in her voice, but it was gone, when she went on to say, with a curled lip, 'So, as we are genteel and poor, I am content that we should be made rich by these means; all I say is, I have kept the only purpose I have had the strength to form - I had almost said the power, with you at my side, Mother - and have not tempted this man on.'

'This man! You speak,' said her mother, 'as if you hated him.'

'And you thought I loved him, did you not?' she answered, stopping on her way across the room, and looking round. 'Shall I tell you,' she continued, with her eyes fixed on her mother, 'who already knows us thoroughly, and reads us right, and before whom I have even less of self-respect or confidence than before my own inward self; being so much degraded by his knowledge of me?'

'This is an attack, I suppose,' returned her mother coldly, 'on poor, unfortunate what's-his-name - Mr Carker! Your want of self-respect and confidence, my dear, in reference to that person (who is very agreeable, it strikes me), is not likely to have much effect on your establishment. Why do you look at me so hard? Are you ill?'

Edith suddenly let fall her face, as if it had been stung, and while she pressed her hands upon it, a terrible tremble crept over her whole frame. It was quickly gone; and with her usual step, she passed out of the room.

The maid who should have been a skeleton, then reappeared, and giving one arm to her mistress, who appeared to have taken off her manner with her charms, and to have put on paralysis with her flannel gown, collected the ashes of Cleopatra, and carried them away in the other, ready for tomorrow's revivification.