Chapter XXXI - The Wedding

Dawn with its passionless blank face, steals shivering to the church beneath which lies the dust of little Paul and his mother, and looks in at the windows. It is cold and dark. Night crouches yet, upon the pavement, and broods, sombre and heavy, in nooks and corners of the building. The steeple-clock, perched up above the houses, emerging from beneath another of the countless ripples in the tide of time that regularly roll and break on the eternal shore, is greyly visible, like a stone beacon, recording how the sea flows on; but within doors, dawn, at first, can only peep at night, and see that it is there.

Hovering feebly round the church, and looking in, dawn moans and weeps for its short reign, and its tears trickle on the window-glass, and the trees against the church-wall bow their heads, and wring their many hands in sympathy. Night, growing pale before it, gradually fades out of the church, but lingers in the vaults below, and sits upon the coffins. And now comes bright day, burnishing the steeple-clock, and reddening the spire, and drying up the tears of dawn, and stifling its complaining; and the dawn, following the night, and chasing it from its last refuge, shrinks into the vaults itself and hides, with a frightened face, among the dead, until night returns, refreshed, to drive it out.

And now, the mice, who have been busier with the prayer-books than their proper owners, and with the hassocks, more worn by their little teeth than by human knees, hide their bright eyes in their holes, and gather close together in affright at the resounding clashing of the church-door. For the beadle, that man of power, comes early this morning with the sexton; and Mrs Miff, the wheezy little pew-opener - a mighty dry old lady, sparely dressed, with not an inch of fulness anywhere about her - is also here, and has been waiting at the church-gate half-an-hour, as her place is, for the beadle.

A vinegary face has Mrs Miff, and a mortified bonnet, and eke a thirsty soul for sixpences and shillings. Beckoning to stray people to come into pews, has given Mrs Miff an air of mystery; and there is reservation in the eye of Mrs Miff, as always knowing of a softer seat, but having her suspicions of the fee. There is no such fact as Mr Miff, nor has there been, these twenty years, and Mrs Miff would rather not allude to him. He held some bad opinions, it would seem, about free seats; and though Mrs Miff hopes he may be gone upwards, she couldn't positively undertake to say so.

Busy is Mrs Miff this morning at the church-door, beating and dusting the altar-cloth, the carpet, and the cushions; and much has Mrs Miff to say, about the wedding they are going to have. Mrs Miff is told, that the new furniture and alterations in the house cost full five thousand

pound if they cost a penny; and Mrs Miff has heard, upon the best authority, that the lady hasn't got a sixpence wherewithal to bless herself. Mrs Miff remembers, like wise, as if it had happened yesterday, the first wife's funeral, and then the christening, and then the other funeral; and Mrs Miff says, by-the-bye she'll soap-and-water that 'ere tablet presently, against the company arrive. Mr Sownds the Beadle, who is sitting in the sun upon the church steps all this time (and seldom does anything else, except, in cold weather, sitting by the fire), approves of Mrs Miff's discourse, and asks if Mrs Miff has heard it said, that the lady is uncommon handsome? The information Mrs Miff has received, being of this nature, Mr Sownds the Beadle, who, though orthodox and corpulent, is still an admirer of female beauty, observes, with unction, yes, he hears she is a spanker - an expression that seems somewhat forcible to Mrs Miff, or would, from any lips but those of Mr Sownds the Beadle.

In Mr Dombey's house, at this same time, there is great stir and bustle, more especially among the women: not one of whom has had a wink of sleep since four o'clock, and all of whom were fully dressed before six. Mr Towlinson is an object of greater consideration than usual to the housemaid, and the cook says at breakfast time that one wedding makes many, which the housemaid can't believe, and don't think true at all. Mr Towlinson reserves his sentiments on this question; being rendered something gloomy by the engagement of a foreigner with whiskers (Mr Towlinson is whiskerless himself), who has been hired to accompany the happy pair to Paris, and who is busy packing the new chariot. In respect of this personage, Mr Towlinson admits, presently, that he never knew of any good that ever come of foreigners; and being charged by the ladies with prejudice, says, look at Bonaparte who was at the head of 'em, and see what he was always up to! Which the housemaid says is very true.

The pastry-cook is hard at work in the funereal room in Brook Street, and the very tall young men are busy looking on. One of the very tall young men already smells of sherry, and his eyes have a tendency to become fixed in his head, and to stare at objects without seeing them. The very tall young man is conscious of this failing in himself; and informs his comrade that it's his 'exciseman.' The very tall young man would say excitement, but his speech is hazy.

The men who play the bells have got scent of the marriage; and the marrow-bones and cleavers too; and a brass band too. The first, are practising in a back settlement near Battlebridge; the second, put themselves in communication, through their chief, with Mr Towlinson, to whom they offer terms to be bought off; and the third, in the person of an artful trombone, lurks and dodges round the corner, waiting for some traitor tradesman to reveal the place and hour of breakfast, for a bribe. Expectation and excitement extend further yet, and take a

wider range. From Balls Pond, Mr Perch brings Mrs Perch to spend the day with Mr Dombey's servants, and accompany them, surreptitiously, to see the wedding. In Mr Toots's lodgings, Mr Toots attires himself as if he were at least the Bridegroom; determined to behold the spectacle in splendour from a secret corner of the gallery, and thither to convey the Chicken: for it is Mr Toots's desperate intent to point out Florence to the Chicken, then and there, and openly to say, 'Now, Chicken, I will not deceive you any longer; the friend I have sometimes mentioned to you is myself; Miss Dombey is the object of my passion; what are your opinions, Chicken, in this state of things, and what, on the spot, do you advise? The so-much-to-be-astonished Chicken, in the meanwhile, dips his beak into a tankard of strong beer, in Mr Toots's kitchen, and pecks up two pounds of beefsteaks. In Princess's Place, Miss Tox is up and doing; for she too, though in sore distress, is resolved to put a shilling in the hands of Mrs Miff, and see the ceremony which has a cruel fascination for her, from some lonely corner. The quarters of the wooden Midshipman are all alive; for Captain Cuttle, in his ankle-jacks and with a huge shirt-collar, is seated at his breakfast, listening to Rob the Grinder as he reads the marriage service to him beforehand, under orders, to the end that the Captain may perfectly understand the solemnity he is about to witness: for which purpose, the Captain gravely lays injunctions on his chaplain, from time to time, to 'put about,' or to 'overhaul that 'ere article again,' or to stick to his own duty, and leave the Amens to him, the Captain; one of which he repeats, whenever a pause is made by Rob the Grinder, with sonorous satisfaction.

Besides all this, and much more, twenty nursery-maids in Mr Dombey's street alone, have promised twenty families of little women, whose instinctive interest in nuptials dates from their cradles, that they shall go and see the marriage. Truly, Mr Sownds the Beadle has good reason to feel himself in office, as he suns his portly figure on the church steps, waiting for the marriage hour. Truly, Mrs Miff has cause to pounce on an unlucky dwarf child, with a giant baby, who peeps in at the porch, and drive her forth with indignation!

Cousin Feenix has come over from abroad, expressly to attend the marriage. Cousin Feenix was a man about town, forty years ago; but he is still so juvenile in figure and in manner, and so well got up, that strangers are amazed when they discover latent wrinkles in his lordship's face, and crows' feet in his eyes: and first observe him, not exactly certain when he walks across a room, of going quite straight to where he wants to go. But Cousin Feenix, getting up at half-past seven o'clock or so, is quite another thing from Cousin Feenix got up; and very dim, indeed, he looks, while being shaved at Long's Hotel, in Bond Street.

Mr Dombey leaves his dressing-room, amidst a general whisking away of the women on the staircase, who disperse in all directions, with a great rustling of skirts, except Mrs Perch, who, being (but that she always is) in an interesting situation, is not nimble, and is obliged to face him, and is ready to sink with confusion as she curtesys; - may Heaven avert all evil consequences from the house of Perch! Mr Dombey walks up to the drawing-room, to bide his time. Gorgeous are Mr Dombey's new blue coat, fawn-coloured pantaloons, and lilac waistcoat; and a whisper goes about the house, that Mr Dombey's hair is curled.

A double knock announces the arrival of the Major, who is gorgeous too, and wears a whole geranium in his button-hole, and has his hair curled tight and crisp, as well the Native knows.

'Dombey!' says the Major, putting out both hands, 'how are you?'

'Major,' says Mr Dombey, 'how are You?'

'By Jove, Sir,' says the Major, 'Joey B. is in such case this morning, Sir,' - and here he hits himself hard upon the breast - 'In such case this morning, Sir, that, damme, Dombey, he has half a mind to make a double marriage of it, Sir, and take the mother.'

Mr Dombey smiles; but faintly, even for him; for Mr Dombey feels that he is going to be related to the mother, and that, under those circumstances, she is not to be joked about.

'Dombey,' says the Major, seeing this, 'I give you joy. I congratulate you, Dombey. By the Lord, Sir,' says the Major, 'you are more to be envied, this day, than any man in England!'

Here again Mr Dombey's assent is qualified; because he is going to confer a great distinction on a lady; and, no doubt, she is to be envied most.

'As to Edith Granger, Sir,' pursues the Major, 'there is not a woman in all Europe but might - and would, Sir, you will allow Bagstock to add - and would- give her ears, and her earrings, too, to be in Edith Granger's place.'

'You are good enough to say so, Major,' says Mr Dombey.

'Dombey,' returns the Major, 'you know it. Let us have no false delicacy. You know it. Do you know it, or do you not, Dombey?' says the Major, almost in a passion.

'Oh, really, Major - '

'Damme, Sir,' retorts the Major, 'do you know that fact, or do you not? Dombey! Is old Joe your friend? Are we on that footing of unreserved intimacy, Dombey, that may justify a man - a blunt old Joseph B., Sir - in speaking out; or am I to take open order, Dombey, and to keep my distance, and to stand on forms?'

'My dear Major Bagstock,' says Mr Dombey, with a gratified air, 'you are quite warm.'

'By Gad, Sir,' says the Major, 'I am warm. Joseph B. does not deny it, Dombey. He is warm. This is an occasion, Sir, that calls forth all the honest sympathies remaining in an old, infernal, battered, used-up, invalided, J. B. carcase. And I tell you what, Dombey - at such a time a man must blurt out what he feels, or put a muzzle on; and Joseph Bagstock tells you to your face, Dombey, as he tells his club behind your back, that he never will be muzzled when Paul Dombey is in question. Now, damme, Sir,' concludes the Major, with great firmness, 'what do you make of that?'

'Major,' says Mr Dombey, 'I assure you that I am really obliged to you. I had no idea of checking your too partial friendship.'

'Not too partial, Sir!' exclaims the choleric Major. 'Dombey, I deny it.'

'Your friendship I will say then,' pursues Mr Dombey, 'on any account. Nor can I forget, Major, on such an occasion as the present, how much I am indebted to it.'

'Dombey,' says the Major, with appropriate action, 'that is the hand of Joseph Bagstock: of plain old Joey B., Sir, if you like that better! That is the hand, of which His Royal Highness the late Duke of York, did me the honour to observe, Sir, to His Royal Highness the late Duke of Kent, that it was the hand of Josh: a rough and tough, and possibly an up-to-snuff, old vagabond. Dombey, may the present moment be the least unhappy of our lives. God bless you!'

Now enters Mr Carker, gorgeous likewise, and smiling like a wedding-guest indeed. He can scarcely let Mr Dombey's hand go, he is so congratulatory; and he shakes the Major's hand so heartily at the same time, that his voice shakes too, in accord with his arms, as it comes sliding from between his teeth.

'The very day is auspicious,' says Mr Carker. 'The brightest and most genial weather! I hope I am not a moment late?'

'Punctual to your time, Sir,' says the Major.

'I am rejoiced, I am sure,' says Mr Carker. 'I was afraid I might be a few seconds after the appointed time, for I was delayed by a procession of waggons; and I took the liberty of riding round to Brook Street' - this to Mr Dombey - 'to leave a few poor rarities of flowers for Mrs Dombey. A man in my position, and so distinguished as to be invited here, is proud to offer some homage in acknowledgment of his vassalage: and as I have no doubt Mrs Dombey is overwhelmed with what is costly and magnificent;' with a strange glance at his patron; 'I hope the very poverty of my offering, may find favour for it.'

'Mrs Dombey, that is to be,' returns Mr Dombey, condescendingly, 'will be very sensible of your attention, Carker, I am sure.'

'And if she is to be Mrs Dombey this morning, Sir,' says the Major, putting down his coffee-cup, and looking at his watch, 'it's high time we were off!'

Forth, in a barouche, ride Mr Dombey, Major Bagstock, and Mr Carker, to the church. Mr Sownds the Beadle has long risen from the steps, and is in waiting with his cocked hat in his hand. Mrs Miff curtseys and proposes chairs in the vestry. Mr Dombey prefers remaining in the church. As he looks up at the organ, Miss Tox in the gallery shrinks behind the fat leg of a cherubim on a monument, with cheeks like a young Wind. Captain Cuttle, on the contrary, stands up and waves his hook, in token of welcome and encouragement. Mr Toots informs the Chicken, behind his hand, that the middle gentleman, he in the fawn-coloured pantaloons, is the father of his love. The Chicken hoarsely whispers Mr Toots that he's as stiff a cove as ever he see, but that it is within the resources of Science to double him up, with one blow in the waistcoat.

Mr Sownds and Mrs Miff are eyeing Mr Dombey from a little distance, when the noise of approaching wheels is heard, and Mr Sownds goes out. Mrs Miff, meeting Mr Dombey's eye as it is withdrawn from the presumptuous maniac upstairs, who salutes him with so much urbanity, drops a curtsey, and informs him that she believes his 'good lady' is come. Then there is a crowding and a whispering at the door, and the good lady enters, with a haughty step.

There is no sign upon her face, of last night's suffering; there is no trace in her manner, of the woman on the bended knees, reposing her wild head, in beautiful abandonment, upon the pillow of the sleeping girl. That girl, all gentle and lovely, is at her side - a striking contrast to her own disdainful and defiant figure, standing there, composed, erect, inscrutable of will, resplendent and majestic in the zenith of its charms, yet beating down, and treading on, the admiration that it challenges.

There is a pause while Mr Sownds the Beadle glides into the vestry for the clergyman and clerk. At this juncture, Mrs Skewton speaks to Mr Dombey: more distinctly and emphatically than her custom is, and moving at the same time, close to Edith.

'My dear Dombey,' said the good Mama, 'I fear I must relinquish darling Florence after all, and suffer her to go home, as she herself proposed. After my loss of to-day, my dear Dombey, I feel I shall not have spirits, even for her society.'

'Had she not better stay with you?' returns the Bridegroom.

'I think not, my dear Dombey. No, I think not. I shall be better alone. Besides, my dearest Edith will be her natural and constant guardian when you return, and I had better not encroach upon her trust, perhaps. She might be jealous. Eh, dear Edith?'

The affectionate Mama presses her daughter's arm, as she says this; perhaps entreating her attention earnestly.

'To be serious, my dear Dombey,' she resumes, 'I will relinquish our dear child, and not inflict my gloom upon her. We have settled that, just now. She fully understands, dear Dombey. Edith, my dear, - she fully understands.'

Again, the good mother presses her daughter's arm. Mr Dombey offers no additional remonstrance; for the clergyman and clerk appear; and Mrs Miff, and Mr Sownds the Beadle, group the party in their proper places at the altar rails.

The sun is shining down, upon the golden letters of the ten commandments. Why does the Bride's eye read them, one by one? Which one of all the ten appears the plainest to her in the glare of light? False Gods; murder; theft; the honour that she owes her mother; - which is it that appears to leave the wall, and printing itself in glowing letters, on her book!

'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

Cousin Feenix does that. He has come from Baden-Baden on purpose. 'Confound it,' Cousin Feenix says - good-natured creature, Cousin Feenix - 'when we do get a rich City fellow into the family, let us show him some attention; let us do something for him.' I give this woman to be married to this man,' saith Cousin Feenix therefore. Cousin Feenix, meaning to go in a straight line, but turning off sideways by reason of his wilful legs, gives the wrong woman to be married to this man, at first - to wit, a brides- maid of some condition, distantly connected with the family, and ten years Mrs Skewton's junior - but Mrs Miff,

interposing her mortified bonnet, dexterously turns him back, and runs him, as on castors, full at the 'good lady:' whom Cousin Feenix giveth to married to this man accordingly. And will they in the sight of heaven - ? Ay, that they will: Mr Dombey says he will. And what says Edith? She will. So, from that day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do them part, they plight their troth to one another, and are married. In a firm, free hand, the Bride subscribes her name in the register, when they adjourn to the vestry. 'There ain't a many ladies come here,' Mrs Miff says with a curtsey - to look at Mrs Miff, at such a season, is to make her mortified bonnet go down with a dip - writes their names like this good lady!' Mr Sownds the Beadle thinks it is a truly spanking signature, and worthy of the writer - this, however, between himself and conscience. Florence signs too, but unapplauded, for her hand shakes. All the party sign; Cousin Feenix last; who puts his noble name into a wrong place, and enrols himself as having been born that morning. The Major now salutes the Bride right gallantly, and carries out that branch of military tactics in reference to all the ladies: notwithstanding Mrs Skewton's being extremely hard to kiss, and squeaking shrilly in the sacred edIfice. The example is followed by Cousin. Feenix and even by Mr Dombey. Lastly, Mr Carker, with hIs white teeth glistening, approaches Edith, more as if he meant to bite her, than to taste the sweets that linger on her lips.

There is a glow upon her proud cheek, and a flashing in her eyes, that may be meant to stay him; but it does not, for he salutes her as the rest have done, and wishes her all happiness.

'If wishes,' says he in a low voice, 'are not superfluous, applied to such a union.'

'I thank you, Sir,' she answers, with a curled lip, and a heaving bosom.

But, does Edith feel still, as on the night when she knew that Mr Dombey would return to offer his alliance, that Carker knows her thoroughly, and reads her right, and that she is more degraded by his knowledge of her, than by aught else? Is it for this reason that her haughtiness shrinks beneath his smile, like snow within the hands that grasps it firmly, and that her imperious glance droops In meeting his, and seeks the ground?

'I am proud to see,' said Mr Carker, with a servile stooping of his neck, which the revelations making by his eyes and teeth proclaim to be a lie, 'I am proud to see that my humble offering is graced by Mrs Dombey's hand, and permitted to hold so favoured a place in so joyful an occasion.'

Though she bends her head, in answer, there is something in the momentary action of her hand, as if she would crush the flowers it holds, and fling them, with contempt, upon the ground. But, she puts the hand through the arm of her new husband, who has been standing near, conversing with the Major, and is proud again, and motionless, and silent.

The carriages are once more at the church door. Mr Dombey, with his bride upon his arm, conducts her through the twenty families of little women who are on the steps, and every one of whom remembers the fashion and the colour of her every article of dress from that moment, and reproduces it on her doll, who is for ever being married. Cleopatra and Cousin Feenix enter the same carriage. The Major hands into a second carriage, Florence, and the bridesmaid who so narrowly escaped being given away by mistake, and then enters it himself, and is followed by Mr Carker. Horses prance and caper; coachmen and footmen shine in fluttering favours, flowers, and new-made liveries. Away they dash and rattle through the streets; and as they pass along, a thousand heads are turned to look at them, and a thousand sober moralists revenge themselves for not being married too, that morning, by reflecting that these people little think such happiness can't last.

Miss Tox emerges from behind the cherubim's leg, when all is quiet, and comes slowly down from the gallery. Miss Tox's eyes are red, and her pocket-handkerchief is damp. She is wounded, but not exasperated, and she hopes they may be happy. She quite admits to herself the beauty of the bride, and her own comparatively feeble and faded attractions; but the stately image of Mr Dombey in his lilac waistcoat, and his fawn-coloured pantaloons, is present to her mind, and Miss Tox weeps afresh, behind her veil, on her way home to Princess's Place. Captain Cuttle, having joined in all the amens and responses, with a devout growl, feels much improved by his religious exercises; and in a peaceful frame of mind pervades the body of the church, glazed hat in hand, and reads the tablet to the memory of little Paul. The gallant Mr Toots, attended by the faithful Chicken, leaves the building in torments of love. The Chicken is as yet unable to elaborate a scheme for winning Florence, but his first idea has gained possession of him, and he thinks the doubling up of Mr Dombey would be a move in the right direction. Mr Dombey's servants come out of their hiding-places, and prepare to rush to Brook Street, when they are delayed by symptoms of indisposition on the part of Mrs Perch, who entreats a glass of water, and becomes alarming; Mrs Perch gets better soon, however, and is borne away; and Mrs Miff, and Mr Sownds the Beadle, sit upon the steps to count what they have gained by the affair, and talk it over, while the sexton tolls a funeral.

Now, the carriages arrive at the Bride's residence, and the players on the bells begin to jingle, and the band strikes up, and Mr Punch, that model of connubial bliss, salutes his wife. Now, the people run, and push, and press round in a gaping throng, while Mr Dombey, leading Mrs Dombey by the hand, advances solemnly into the Feenix Halls. Now, the rest of the wedding party alight, and enter after them. And why does Mr Carker, passing through the people to the hall-door, think of the old woman who called to him in the Grove that morning? Or why does Florence, as she passes, think, with a tremble, of her childhood, when she was lost, and of the visage of Good Mrs Brown?

Now, there are more congratulations on this happiest of days, and more company, though not much; and now they leave the drawing-room, and range themselves at table in the dark-brown dining-room, which no confectioner can brighten up, let him garnish the exhausted negroes with as many flowers and love-knots as he will.

The pastry-cook has done his duty like a man, though, and a rich breakfast is set forth. Mr and Mrs Chick have joined the party, among others. Mrs Chick admires that Edith should be, by nature, such a perfect Dombey; and is affable and confidential to Mrs Skewton, whose mind is relieved of a great load, and who takes her share of the champagne. The very tall young man who suffered from excitement early, is better; but a vague sentiment of repentance has seized upon him, and he hates the other very tall young man, and wrests dishes from him by violence, and takes a grim delight in disobliging the company. The company are cool and calm, and do not outrage the black hatchments of pictures looking down upon them, by any excess of mirth. Cousin Feenix and the Major are the gayest there; but Mr Carker has a smile for the whole table. He has an especial smile for the Bride, who very, very seldom meets it.

Cousin Feenix rises, when the company have breakfasted, and the servants have left the room; and wonderfully young he looks, with his white wristbands almost covering his hands (otherwise rather bony), and the bloom of the champagne in his cheeks.

'Upon my honour,' says Cousin Feenix, 'although it's an unusual sort of thing in a private gentleman's house, I must beg leave to call upon you to drink what is usually called a - in fact a toast.

The Major very hoarsely indicates his approval. Mr Carker, bending his head forward over the table in the direction of Cousin Feenix, smiles and nods a great many times.

'A - in fact it's not a - ' Cousin Feenix beginning again, thus, comes to a dead stop.

'Hear, hear!' says the Major, in a tone of conviction.

Mr Carker softly claps his hands, and bending forward over the table again, smiles and nods a great many more times than before, as if he were particularly struck by this last observation, and desired personally to express his sense of the good it has done

'It is,' says Cousin Feenix, 'an occasion in fact, when the general usages of life may be a little departed from, without impropriety; and although I never was an orator in my life, and when I was in the House of Commons, and had the honour of seconding the address, was - in fact, was laid up for a fortnight with the consciousness of failure - '

The Major and Mr Carker are so much delighted by this fragment of personal history, that Cousin Feenix laughs, and addressing them individually, goes on to say:

'And in point of fact, when I was devilish ill - still, you know, I feel that a duty devolves upon me. And when a duty devolves upon an Englishman, he is bound to get out of it, in my opinion, in the best way he can. Well! our family has had the gratification, to-day, of connecting itself, in the person of my lovely and accomplished relative, whom I now see - in point of fact, present - '

Here there is general applause.

'Present,' repeats Cousin Feenix, feeling that it is a neat point which will bear repetition, - 'with one who - that is to say, with a man, at whom the finger of scorn can never - in fact, with my honourable friend Dombey, if he will allow me to call him so.'

Cousin Feenix bows to Mr Dombey; Mr Dombey solemnly returns the bow; everybody is more or less gratified and affected by this extraordinary, and perhaps unprecedented, appeal to the feelings.

'I have not,' says Cousin Feenix, 'enjoyed those opportunities which I could have desired, of cultivating the acquaintance of my friend Dombey, and studying those qualities which do equal honour to his head, and, in point of fact, to his heart; for it has been my misfortune to be, as we used to say in my time in the House of Commons, when it was not the custom to allude to the Lords, and when the order of parliamentary proceedings was perhaps better observed than it is now - to be in - in point of fact,' says Cousin Feenix, cherishing his joke, with great slyness, and finally bringing it out with a jerk, "in another place!"

The Major falls into convulsions, and is recovered with difficulty.

'But I know sufficient of my friend Dombey,' resumes Cousin Feenix in a graver tone, as if he had suddenly become a sadder and wiser man' 'to know that he is, in point of fact, what may be emphatically called a - a merchant - a British merchant - and a - and a man. And although I have been resident abroad, for some years (it would give me great pleasure to receive my friend Dombey, and everybody here, at Baden-Baden, and to have an opportunity of making 'em known to the Grand Duke), still I know enough, I flatter myself, of my lovely and accomplished relative, to know that she possesses every requisite to make a man happy, and that her marriage with my friend Dombey is one of inclination and affection on both sides.'

Many smiles and nods from Mr Carker.

'Therefore,' says Cousin Feenix, 'I congratulate the family of which I am a member, on the acquisition of my friend Dombey. I congratulate my friend Dombey on his union with my lovely and accomplished relative who possesses every requisite to make a man happy; and I take the liberty of calling on you all, in point of fact, to congratulate both my friend Dombey and my lovely and accomplished relative, on the present occasion.'

The speech of Cousin Feenix is received with great applause, and Mr Dombey returns thanks on behalf of himself and Mrs Dombey. J. B. shortly afterwards proposes Mrs Skewton. The breakfast languishes when that is done, the violated hatchments are avenged, and Edith rises to assume her travelling dress.

All the servants in the meantime, have been breakfasting below. Champagne has grown too common among them to be mentioned, and roast fowls, raised pies, and lobster-salad, have become mere drugs. The very tall young man has recovered his spirits, and again alludes to the exciseman. His comrade's eye begins to emulate his own, and he, too, stares at objects without taking cognizance thereof. There is a general redness in the faces of the ladies; in the face of Mrs Perch particularly, who is joyous and beaming, and lifted so far above the cares of life, that if she were asked just now to direct a wayfarer to Ball's Pond, where her own cares lodge, she would have some difficulty in recalling the way. Mr Towlinson has proposed the happy pair; to which the silver-headed butler has responded neatly, and with emotion; for he half begins to think he is an old retainer of the family, and that he is bound to be affected by these changes. The whole party, and especially the ladies, are very frolicsome. Mr Dombey's cook, who generally takes the lead in society, has said, it is impossible to settle down after this, and why not go, in a party, to the play? Everybody (Mrs Perch included) has agreed to this; even the Native, who is tigerish in his drink, and who alarms the ladies (Mrs Perch particularly) by the rolling of his eyes. One of the very tall young men

has even proposed a ball after the play, and it presents itself to no one (Mrs Perch included) in the light of an impossibility. Words have arisen between the housemaid and Mr Towlinson; she, on the authority of an old saw, asserting marriages to be made in Heaven: he, affecting to trace the manufacture elsewhere; he, supposing that she says so, because she thinks of being married her own self: she, saying, Lord forbid, at any rate, that she should ever marry him. To calm these flying taunts, the silver-headed butler rises to propose the health of Mr Towlinson, whom to know is to esteem, and to esteem is to wish well settled in life with the object of his choice, wherever (here the silver-headed butler eyes the housemaid) she may be. Mr Towlinson returns thanks in a speech replete with feeling, of which the peroration turns on foreigners, regarding whom he says they may find favour, sometimes, with weak and inconstant intellects that can be led away by hair, but all he hopes, is, he may never hear of no foreigner never boning nothing out of no travelling chariot. The eye of Mr Towlinson is so severe and so expressive here, that the housemaid is turning hysterical, when she and all the rest, roused by the intelligence that the Bride is going away, hurry upstairs to witness her departure.

The chariot is at the door; the Bride is descending to the hall, where Mr Dombey waits for her. Florence is ready on the staircase to depart too; and Miss Nipper, who has held a middle state between the parlour and the kitchen, is prepared to accompany her. As Edith appears, Florence hastens towards her, to bid her farewell.

Is Edith cold, that she should tremble! Is there anything unnatural or unwholesome in the touch of Florence, that the beautiful form recedes and contracts, as if it could not bear it! Is there so much hurry in this going away, that Edith, with a wave of her hand, sweeps on, and is gone!

Mrs Skewton, overpowered by her feelings as a mother, sinks on her sofa in the Cleopatra attitude, when the clatter of the chariot wheels is lost, and sheds several tears. The Major, coming with the rest of the company from table, endeavours to comfort her; but she will not be comforted on any terms, and so the Major takes his leave. Cousin Feenix takes his leave, and Mr Carker takes his leave. The guests all go away. Cleopatra, left alone, feels a little giddy from her strong emotion, and falls asleep.

Giddiness prevails below stairs too. The very tall young man whose excitement came on so soon, appears to have his head glued to the table in the pantry, and cannot be detached from - it. A violent revulsion has taken place in the spirits of Mrs Perch, who is low on account of Mr Perch, and tells cook that she fears he is not so much attached to his home, as he used to be, when they were only nine in

family. Mr Towlinson has a singing in his ears and a large wheel going round and round inside his head. The housemaid wishes it wasn't wicked to wish that one was dead.

There is a general delusion likewise, in these lower regions, on the subject of time; everybody conceiving that it ought to be, at the earliest, ten o'clock at night, whereas it is not yet three in the afternoon. A shadowy idea of wickedness committed, haunts every individual in the party; and each one secretly thinks the other a companion in guilt, whom it would be agreeable to avoid. No man or woman has the hardihood to hint at the projected visit to the play. Anyone reviving the notion of the ball, would be scouted as a malignant idiot.

Mrs Skewton sleeps upstairs, two hours afterwards, and naps are not yet over in the kitchen. The hatchments in the dining-room look down on crumbs, dirty plates, spillings of wine, half-thawed ice, stale discoloured heel-taps, scraps of lobster, drumsticks of fowls, and pensive jellies, gradually resolving themselves into a lukewarm gummy soup. The marriage is, by this time, almost as denuded of its show and garnish as the breakfast. Mr Dombey's servants moralise so much about it, and are so repentant over their early tea, at home, that by eight o'clock or so, they settle down into confirmed seriousness; and Mr Perch, arriving at that time from the City, fresh and jocular, with a white waistcoat and a comic song, ready to spend the evening, and prepared for any amount of dissipation, is amazed to find himself coldly received, and Mrs Perch but poorly, and to have the pleasing duty of escorting that lady home by the next omnibus.

Night closes in. Florence, having rambled through the handsome house, from room to room, seeks her own chamber, where the care of Edith has surrounded her with luxuries and comforts; and divesting herself of her handsome dress, puts on her old simple mourning for dear Paul, and sits down to read, with Diogenes winking and blinking on the ground beside her. But Florence cannot read tonight. The house seems strange and new, and there are loud echoes in it. There is a shadow on her heart: she knows not why or what: but it is heavy. Florence shuts her book, and gruff Diogenes, who takes that for a signal, puts his paws upon her lap, and rubs his ears against her caressing hands. But Florence cannot see him plainly, in a little time, for there is a mist between her eyes and him, and her dead brother and dead mother shine in it like angels. Walter, too, poor wandering shipwrecked boy, oh, where is he?

The Major don't know; that's for certain; and don't care. The Major, having choked and slumbered, all the afternoon, has taken a late dinner at his club, and now sits over his pint of wine, driving a modest young man, with a fresh-coloured face, at the next table (who would

give a handsome sum to be able to rise and go away, but cannot do it) to the verge of madness, by anecdotes of Bagstock, Sir, at Dombey's wedding, and Old Joe's devilish gentle manly friend, Lord Feenix. While Cousin Feenix, who ought to be at Long's, and in bed, finds himself, instead, at a gaming-table, where his wilful legs have taken him, perhaps, in his own despite.

Night, like a giant, fills the church, from pavement to roof, and holds dominion through the silent hours. Pale dawn again comes peeping through the windows: and, giving place to day, sees night withdraw into the vaults, and follows it, and drives it out, and hides among the dead. The timid mice again cower close together, when the great door clashes, and Mr Sownds and Mrs Miff treading the circle of their daily lives, unbroken as a marriage ring, come in. Again, the cocked hat and the mortified bonnet stand in the background at the marriage hour; and again this man taketh this woman, and this woman taketh this man, on the solemn terms:

'To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do them part.'

The very words that Mr Carker rides into town repeating, with his mouth stretched to the utmost, as he picks his dainty way.