

Chapter XXXII - The Wooden Midshipman Goes To Pieces

Honest Captain Cuttle, as the weeks flew over him in his fortified retreat, by no means abated any of his prudent provisions against surprise, because of the non-appearance of the enemy. The Captain argued that his present security was too profound and wonderful to endure much longer; he knew that when the wind stood in a fair quarter, the weathercock was seldom nailed there; and he was too well acquainted with the determined and dauntless character of Mrs MacStinger, to doubt that that heroic woman had devoted herself to the task of his discovery and capture. Trembling beneath the weight of these reasons, Captain Cuttle lived a very close and retired life; seldom stirring abroad until after dark; venturing even then only into the obscurest streets; never going forth at all on Sundays; and both within and without the walls of his retreat, avoiding bonnets, as if they were worn by raging lions.

The Captain never dreamed that in the event of his being pounced upon by Mrs MacStinger, in his walks, it would be possible to offer resistance. He felt that it could not be done. He saw himself, in his mind's eye, put meekly in a hackney-coach, and carried off to his old lodgings. He foresaw that, once immured there, he was a lost man: his hat gone; Mrs MacStinger watchful of him day and night; reproaches heaped upon his head, before the infant family; himself the guilty object of suspicion and distrust; an ogre in the children's eyes, and in their mother's a detected traitor.

A violent perspiration, and a lowness of spirits, always came over the Captain as this gloomy picture presented itself to his imagination. It generally did so previous to his stealing out of doors at night for air and exercise. Sensible of the risk he ran, the Captain took leave of Rob, at those times, with the solemnity which became a man who might never return: exhorting him, in the event of his (the Captain's) being lost sight of, for a time, to tread in the paths of virtue, and keep the brazen instruments well polished.

But not to throw away a chance; and to secure to himself a means, in case of the worst, of holding communication with the external world; Captain Cuttle soon conceived the happy idea of teaching Rob the Grinder some secret signal, by which that adherent might make his presence and fidelity known to his commander, in the hour of adversity. After much cogitation, the Captain decided in favour of instructing him to whistle the marine melody, 'Oh cheerily, cheerily!' and Rob the Grinder attaining a point as near perfection in that accomplishment as a landsman could hope to reach, the Captain impressed these mysterious instructions on his mind:

'Now, my lad, stand by! If ever I'm took - '

'Took, Captain!' interposed Rob, with his round eyes wide open.

'Ah!' said Captain Cuttle darkly, 'if ever I goes away, meaning to come back to supper, and don't come within hail again, twenty-four hours arter my loss, go you to Brig Place and whistle that 'ere tune near my old moorings - not as if you was a meaning of it, you understand, but as if you'd drifted there, promiscuous. If I answer in that tune, you sheer off, my lad, and come back four-and-twenty hours arterwards; if I answer in another tune, do you stand off and on, and wait till I throw out further signals. Do you understand them orders, now?'

'What am I to stand off and on of, Captain?' inquired Rob. 'The horse-road?'

'Here's a smart lad for you!' cried the Captain eyeing him sternly, 'as don't know his own native alphabet! Go away a bit and come back again alternate - d'ye understand that?'

'Yes, Captain,' said Rob.

'Very good my lad, then,' said the Captain, relenting. 'Do it!'

That he might do it the better, Captain Cuttle sometimes condescended, of an evening after the shop was shut, to rehearse this scene: retiring into the parlour for the purpose, as into the lodgings of a supposititious MacStinger, and carefully observing the behaviour of his ally, from the hole of espial he had cut in the wall. Rob the Grinder discharged himself of his duty with so much exactness and judgment, when thus put to the proof, that the Captain presented him, at divers times, with seven sixpences, in token of satisfaction; and gradually felt stealing over his spirit the resignation of a man who had made provision for the worst, and taken every reasonable precaution against an unrelenting fate.

Nevertheless, the Captain did not tempt ill-fortune, by being a whit more venturesome than before. Though he considered it a point of good breeding in himself, as a general friend of the family, to attend Mr Dombey's wedding (of which he had heard from Mr Perch), and to show that gentleman a pleasant and approving countenance from the gallery, he had repaired to the church in a hackney cabriolet with both windows up; and might have scrupled even to make that venture, in his dread of Mrs MacStinger, but that the lady's attendance on the ministry of the Reverend Melchisedech rendered it peculiarly unlikely that she would be found in communion with the Establishment.

The Captain got safe home again, and fell into the ordinary routine of his new life, without encountering any more direct alarm from the

enemy, than was suggested to him by the daily bonnets in the street. But other subjects began to lay heavy on the Captain's mind. Walter's ship was still unheard of. No news came of old Sol Gills. Florence did not even know of the old man's disappearance, and Captain Cuttle had not the heart to tell her. Indeed the Captain, as his own hopes of the generous, handsome, gallant-hearted youth, whom he had loved, according to his rough manner, from a child, began to fade, and faded more and more from day to day, shrunk with instinctive pain from the thought of exchanging a word with Florence. If he had had good news to carry to her, the honest Captain would have braved the newly decorated house and splendid furniture - though these, connected with the lady he had seen at church, were awful to him - and made his way into her presence. With a dark horizon gathering around their common hopes, however, that darkened every hour, the Captain almost felt as if he were a new misfortune and affliction to her; and was scarcely less afraid of a visit from Florence, than from Mrs MacStinger herself.

It was a chill dark autumn evening, and Captain Cuttle had ordered a fire to be kindled in the little back parlour, now more than ever like the cabin of a ship. The rain fell fast, and the wind blew hard; and straying out on the house-top by that stormy bedroom of his old friend, to take an observation of the weather, the Captain's heart died within him, when he saw how wild and desolate it was. Not that he associated the weather of that time with poor Walter's destiny, or doubted that if Providence had doomed him to be lost and shipwrecked, it was over, long ago; but that beneath an outward influence, quite distinct from the subject-matter of his thoughts, the Captain's spirits sank, and his hopes turned pale, as those of wiser men had often done before him, and will often do again.

Captain Cuttle, addressing his face to the sharp wind and slanting rain, looked up at the heavy scud that was flying fast over the wilderness of house-tops, and looked for something cheery there in vain. The prospect near at hand was no better. In sundry tea-chests and other rough boxes at his feet, the pigeons of Rob the Grinder were cooing like so many dismal breezes getting up. A crazy weathercock of a midshipman, with a telescope at his eye, once visible from the street, but long bricked out, creaked and complained upon his rusty pivot as the shrill blast spun him round and round, and sported with him cruelly. Upon the Captain's coarse blue vest the cold raindrops started like steel beads; and he could hardly maintain himself aslant against the stiff Nor'-Wester that came pressing against him, importunate to topple him over the parapet, and throw him on the pavement below. If there were any Hope alive that evening, the Captain thought, as he held his hat on, it certainly kept house, and wasn't out of doors; so the Captain, shaking his head in a despondent manner, went in to look for it.

Captain Cuttle descended slowly to the little back parlour, and, seated in his accustomed chair, looked for it in the fire; but it was not there, though the fire was bright. He took out his tobacco-box and pipe, and composing himself to smoke, looked for it in the red glow from the bowl, and in the wreaths of vapour that curled upward from his lips; but there was not so much as an atom of the rust of Hope's anchor in either. He tried a glass of grog; but melancholy truth was at the bottom of that well, and he couldn't finish it. He made a turn or two in the shop, and looked for Hope among the instruments; but they obstinately worked out reckonings for the missing ship, in spite of any opposition he could offer, that ended at the bottom of the lone sea.

The wind still rushing, and the rain still pattering, against the closed shutters, the Captain brought to before the wooden Midshipman upon the counter, and thought, as he dried the little officer's uniform with his sleeve, how many years the Midshipman had seen, during which few changes - hardly any - had transpired among his ship's company; how the changes had come all together, one day, as it might be; and of what a sweeping kind they were. Here was the little society of the back parlour broken up, and scattered far and wide. Here was no audience for Lovely Peg, even if there had been anybody to sing it, which there was not; for the Captain was as morally certain that nobody but he could execute that ballad, he was that he had not the spirit, under existing circumstances, to attempt it. There was no bright face of 'Wal'r' in the house; - here the Captain transferred his sleeve for a moment from the Midshipman's uniform to his own cheek; - the familiar wig and buttons of Sol Gills were a vision of the past; Richard Whittington was knocked on the head; and every plan and project in connexion with the Midshipman, lay drifting, without mast or rudder, on the waste of waters.

As the Captain, with a dejected face, stood revolving these thoughts, and polishing the Midshipman, partly in the tenderness of old acquaintance, and partly in the absence of his mind, a knocking at the shop-door communicated a frightful start to the frame of Rob the Grinder, seated on the counter, whose large eyes had been intently fixed on the Captain's face, and who had been debating within himself, for the five hundredth time, whether the Captain could have done a murder, that he had such an evil conscience, and was always running away.

'What's that?' said Captain Cuttle, softly.

'Somebody's knuckles, Captain,' answered Rob the Grinder.

The Captain, with an abashed and guilty air, immediately walked on tiptoe to the little parlour and locked himself in. Rob, opening the door, would have parleyed with the visitor on the threshold if the

visitor had come in female guise; but the figure being of the male sex, and Rob's orders only applying to women, Rob held the door open and allowed it to enter: which it did very quickly, glad to get out of the driving rain.

'A job for Burgess and Co. at any rate,' said the visitor, looking over his shoulder compassionately at his own legs, which were very wet and covered with splashes. 'Oh, how-de-do, Mr Gills?'

The salutation was addressed to the Captain, now emerging from the back parlour with a most transparent and utterly futile affectation of coming out by accident.

'Thankee,' the gentleman went on to say in the same breath; 'I'm very well indeed, myself, I'm much obliged to you. My name is Toots, - Mister Toots.'

The Captain remembered to have seen this young gentleman at the wedding, and made him a bow. Mr Toots replied with a chuckle; and being embarrassed, as he generally was, breathed hard, shook hands with the Captain for a long time, and then falling on Rob the Grinder, in the absence of any other resource, shook hands with him in a most affectionate and cordial manner.

'I say! I should like to speak a word to you, Mr Gills, if you please,' said Toots at length, with surprising presence of mind. 'I say! Miss D.O.M. you know!'

The Captain, with responsive gravity and mystery, immediately waved his hook towards the little parlour, whither Mr Toots followed him.

'Oh! I beg your pardon though,' said Mr Toots, looking up in the Captain's face as he sat down in a chair by the fire, which the Captain placed for him; 'you don't happen to know the Chicken at all; do you, Mr Gills?'

'The Chicken?' said the Captain.

'The Game Chicken,' said Mr Toots.

The Captain shaking his head, Mr Toots explained that the man alluded to was the celebrated public character who had covered himself and his country with glory in his contest with the Nobby Shropshire One; but this piece of information did not appear to enlighten the Captain very much.

'Because he's outside: that's all,' said Mr Toots. 'But it's of no consequence; he won't get very wet, perhaps.'

'I can pass the word for him in a moment,' said the Captain.

'Well, if you would have the goodness to let him sit in the shop with your young man,' chuckled Mr Toots, 'I should be glad; because, you know, he's easily offended, and the damp's rather bad for his stamina. I'll call him in, Mr Gills.'

With that, Mr Toots repairing to the shop-door, sent a peculiar whistle into the night, which produced a stoical gentleman in a shaggy white great-coat and a flat-brimmed hat, with very short hair, a broken nose, and a considerable tract of bare and sterile country behind each ear.

'Sit down, Chicken,' said Mr Toots.

The compliant Chicken spat out some small pieces of straw on which he was regaling himself, and took in a fresh supply from a reserve he carried in his hand.

'There ain't no drain of nothing short handy, is there?' said the Chicken, generally. 'This here sluicing night is hard lines to a man as lives on his condition.'

Captain Cuttle proffered a glass of rum, which the Chicken, throwing back his head, emptied into himself, as into a cask, after proposing the brief sentiment, 'Towards us!' Mr Toots and the Captain returning then to the parlour, and taking their seats before the fire, Mr Toots began:

'Mr Gills - '

'Awast!' said the Captain. 'My name's Cuttle.'

Mr Toots looked greatly disconcerted, while the Captain proceeded gravely.

'Cap'en Cuttle is my name, and England is my nation, this here is my dwelling-place, and blessed be creation - Job,' said the Captain, as an index to his authority.

'Oh! I couldn't see Mr Gills, could I?' said Mr Toots; 'because - '

'If you could see Sol Gills, young gen'l'm'n,' said the Captain, impressively, and laying his heavy hand on Mr Toots's knee, 'old Sol, mind you - with your own eyes - as you sit there - you'd be welcomer to me, than a wind astern, to a ship becalmed. But you can't see Sol Gills. And why can't you see Sol Gills?' said the Captain, apprised by

the face of Mr Toots that he was making a profound impression on that gentleman's mind. 'Because he's invisible.'

Mr Toots in his agitation was going to reply that it was of no consequence at all. But he corrected himself, and said, 'Lor bless me!'

'That there man,' said the Captain, 'has left me in charge here by a piece of writing, but though he was a'most as good as my sworn brother, I know no more where he's gone, or why he's gone; if so be to seek his nevy, or if so be along of being not quite settled in his mind; than you do. One morning at daybreak, he went over the side,' said the Captain, 'without a splash, without a ripple I have looked for that man high and low, and never set eyes, nor ears, nor nothing else, upon him from that hour.'

'But, good Gracious, Miss Dombey don't know - ' Mr Toots began.

'Why, I ask you, as a feeling heart,' said the Captain, dropping his voice, 'why should she know? why should she be made to know, until such time as there wam't any help for it? She took to old Sol Gills, did that sweet creetur, with a kindness, with a affability, with a - what's the good of saying so? you know her.'

'I should hope so,' chuckled Mr Toots, with a conscious blush that suffused his whole countenance.

'And you come here from her?' said the Captain.

'I should think so,' chuckled Mr Toots.

'Then all I need observe, is,' said the Captain, 'that you know a angel, and are chartered a angel.'

Mr Toots instantly seized the Captain's hand, and requested the favour of his friendship.

'Upon my word and honour,' said Mr Toots, earnestly, 'I should be very much obliged to you if you'd improve my acquaintance I should like to know you, Captain, very much. I really am In want of a friend, I am. Little Dombey was my friend at old Blimber's, and would have been now, if he'd have lived. The Chicken,' said Mr Toots, in a forlorn whisper, 'is very well - admirable in his way - the sharpest man perhaps in the world; there's not a move he isn't up to, everybody says so - but I don't know - he's not everything. So she is an angel, Captain. If there is an angel anywhere, it's Miss Dombey. That's what I've always said. Really though, you know,' said Mr Toots, 'I should be very much obliged to you if you'd cultivate my acquaintance.'

Captain Cuttle received this proposal in a polite manner, but still without committing himself to its acceptance; merely observing, 'Ay, ay, my lad. We shall see, we shall see;' and reminding Mr Toots of his immediate mission, by inquiring to what he was indebted for the honour of that visit.

'Why the fact is,' replied Mr Toots, 'that it's the young woman I come from. Not Miss Dombey - Susan, you know.'

The Captain nodded his head once, with a grave expression of face indicative of his regarding that young woman with serious respect.

'And I'll tell you how it happens,' said Mr Toots. 'You know, I go and call sometimes, on Miss Dombey. I don't go there on purpose, you know, but I happen to be in the neighbourhood very often; and when I find myself there, why - why I call.'

'Nat'rally,' observed the Captain.

'Yes,' said Mr Toots. 'I called this afternoon. Upon my word and honour, I don't think it's possible to form an idea of the angel Miss Dombey was this afternoon.'

The Captain answered with a jerk of his head, implying that it might not be easy to some people, but was quite so to him.

'As I was coming out,' said Mr Toots, 'the young woman, in the most unexpected manner, took me into the pantry.'

The Captain seemed, for the moment, to object to this proceeding; and leaning back in his chair, looked at Mr Toots with a distrustful, if not threatening visage.

'Where she brought out,' said Mr Toots, 'this newspaper. She told me that she had kept it from Miss Dombey all day, on account of something that was in it, about somebody that she and Dombey used to know; and then she read the passage to me. Very well. Then she said - wait a minute; what was it she said, though!'

Mr Toots, endeavouring to concentrate his mental powers on this question, unintentionally fixed the Captain's eye, and was so much discomposed by its stern expression, that his difficulty in resuming the thread of his subject was enhanced to a painful extent.

'Oh!' said Mr Toots after long consideration. 'Oh, ah! Yes! She said that she hoped there was a bare possibility that it mightn't be true; and that as she couldn't very well come out herself, without surprising Miss Dombey, would I go down to Mr Solomon Gills the Instrument-

maker's in this street, who was the party's Uncle, and ask whether he believed it was true, or had heard anything else in the City. She said, if he couldn't speak to me, no doubt Captain Cuttle could. By the bye!' said Mr Toots, as the discovery flashed upon him, 'you, you know!'

The Captain glanced at the newspaper in Mr Toots's hand, and breathed short and hurriedly.

'Well, pursued Mr Toots, 'the reason why I'm rather late is, because I went up as far as Finchley first, to get some uncommonly fine chickweed that grows there, for Miss Dombey's bird. But I came on here, directly afterwards. You've seen the paper, I suppose?'

The Captain, who had become cautious of reading the news, lest he should find himself advertised at full length by Mrs MacStinger, shook his head.

'Shall I read the passage to you?' inquired Mr Toots.

The Captain making a sign in the affirmative, Mr Toots read as follows, from the Shipping Intelligence:

"Southampton. The barque Defiance, Henry James, Commander, arrived in this port to-day, with a cargo of sugar, coffee, and rum, reports that being becalmed on the sixth day of her passage home from Jamaica, in' - in such and such a latitude, you know,' said Mr Toots, after making a feeble dash at the figures, and tumbling over them.

'Ay!' cried the Captain, striking his clenched hand on the table. 'Heave ahead, my lad!'

' - latitude,' repeated Mr Toots, with a startled glance at the Captain, 'and longitude so-and-so, - 'the look-out observed, half an hour before sunset, some fragments of a wreck, drifting at about the distance of a mile. The weather being clear, and the barque making no way, a boat was hoisted out, with orders to inspect the same, when they were found to consist of sundry large spars, and a part of the main rigging of an English brig, of about five hundred tons burden, together with a portion of the stem on which the words and letters 'Son and H-' were yet plainly legible. No vestige of any dead body was to be seen upon the floating fragments. Log of the Defiance states, that a breeze springing up in the night, the wreck was seen no more. There can be no doubt that all surmises as to the fate of the missing vessel, the Son and Heir, port of London, bound for Barbados, are now set at rest for ever; that she broke up in the last hurricane; and that every soul on board perished."

Captain Cuttle, like all mankind, little knew how much hope had survived within him under discouragement, until he felt its death-shock. During the reading of the paragraph, and for a minute or two afterwards, he sat with his gaze fixed on the modest Mr Toots, like a man entranced; then, suddenly rising, and putting on his glazed hat, which, in his visitor's honour, he had laid upon the table, the Captain turned his back, and bent his head down on the little chimney-piece.

'Oh' upon my word and honour,' cried Mr Toots, whose tender heart was moved by the Captain's unexpected distress, 'this is a most wretched sort of affair this world is! Somebody's always dying, or going and doing something uncomfortable in it. I'm sure I never should have looked forward so much, to coming into my property, if I had known this. I never saw such a world. It's a great deal worse than Blimber's.'

Captain Cuttle, without altering his position, signed to Mr Toots not to mind him; and presently turned round, with his glazed hat thrust back upon his ears, and his hand composing and smoothing his brown face.

'Wal'r, my dear lad,' said the Captain, 'farewell! Wal'r my child, my boy, and man, I loved you! He warn't my flesh and blood,' said the Captain, looking at the fire - 'I ain't got none - but something of what a father feels when he loses a son, I feel in losing Wal'r. For why?' said the Captain. 'Because it ain't one loss, but a round dozen. Where's that there young school-boy with the rosy face and curly hair, that used to be as merry in this here parlour, come round every week, as a piece of music? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there fresh lad, that nothing couldn't tire nor put out, and that sparkled up and blushed so, when we joked him about Heart's Delight, that he was beautiful to look at? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there man's spirit, all afire, that wouldn't see the old man hove down for a minute, and cared nothing for itself? Gone down with Wal'r. It ain't one Wal'r. There was a dozen Wal'rs that I know'd and loved, all holding round his neck when he went down, and they're a-holding round mine now!'

Mr Toots sat silent: folding and refolding the newspaper as small as possible upon his knee.

'And Sol Gills,' said the Captain, gazing at the fire, 'poor nevyless old Sol, where are you got to! you was left in charge of me; his last words was, 'Take care of my Uncle!' What came over you, Sol, when you went and gave the go-bye to Ned Cuttle; and what am I to put in my accounts that he's a looking down upon, respecting you! Sol Gills, Sol Gills!' said the Captain, shaking his head slowly, 'catch sight of that there newspaper, away from home, with no one as know'd Wal'r by, to say a word; and broadside to you broach, and down you pitch, head foremost!'

Drawing a heavy sigh, the Captain turned to Mr Toots, and roused himself to a sustained consciousness of that gentleman's presence.

'My lad,' said the Captain, 'you must tell the young woman honestly that this here fatal news is too correct. They don't romance, you see, on such pints. It's entered on the ship's log, and that's the truest book as a man can write. To-morrow morning,' said the Captain, 'I'll step out and make inquiries; but they'll lead to no good. They can't do it. If you'll give me a look-in in the forenoon, you shall know what I have heard; but tell the young woman from Cap'en Cuttle, that it's over. Over!' And the Captain, hooking off his glazed hat, pulled his handkerchief out of the crown, wiped his grizzled head despairingly, and tossed the handkerchief in again, with the indifference of deep dejection.

'Oh! I assure you,' said Mr Toots, 'really I am dreadfully sorry. Upon my word I am, though I wasn't acquainted with the party. Do you think Miss Dombey will be very much affected, Captain Gills - I mean Mr Cuttle?'

'Why, Lord love you,' returned the Captain, with something of compassion for Mr Toots's innocence. When she warn't no higher than that, they were as fond of one another as two young doves.'

'Were they though!' said Mr Toots, with a considerably lengthened face.

'They were made for one another,' said the Captain, mournfully; 'but what signifies that now!'

'Upon my word and honour,' cried Mr Toots, blurting out his words through a singular combination of awkward chuckles and emotion, 'I'm even more sorry than I was before. You know, Captain Gills, I - I positively adore Miss Dombey; - I - I am perfectly sore with loving her;' the burst with which this confession forced itself out of the unhappy Mr Toots, bespoke the vehemence of his feelings; 'but what would be the good of my regarding her in this manner, if I wasn't truly sorry for her feeling pain, whatever was the cause of it. Mine ain't a selfish affection, you know,' said Mr Toots, in the confidence engendered by his having been a witness of the Captain's tenderness. 'It's the sort of thing with me, Captain Gills, that if I could be run over - or - or trampled upon - or - or thrown off a very high place -or anything of that sort - for Miss Dombey's sake, it would be the most delightful thing that could happen to me.

All this, Mr Toots said in a suppressed voice, to prevent its reaching the jealous ears of the Chicken, who objected to the softer emotions; which effort of restraint, coupled with the intensity of his feelings,

made him red to the tips of his ears, and caused him to present such an affecting spectacle of disinterested love to the eyes of Captain Cuttle, that the good Captain patted him consolingly on the back, and bade him cheer up.

'Thankee, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'it's kind of you, in the midst of your own troubles, to say so. I'm very much obliged to you. As I said before, I really want a friend, and should be glad to have your acquaintance. Although I am very well off,' said Mr Toots, with energy, 'you can't think what a miserable Beast I am. The hollow crowd, you know, when they see me with the Chicken, and characters of distinction like that, suppose me to be happy; but I'm wretched. I suffer for Miss Dombey, Captain Gills. I can't get through my meals; I have no pleasure in my tailor; I often cry when I'm alone. I assure you it'll be a satisfaction to me to come back to-morrow, or to come back fifty times.'

Mr Toots, with these words, shook the Captain's hand; and disguising such traces of his agitation as could be disguised on so short a notice, before the Chicken's penetrating glance, rejoined that eminent gentleman in the shop. The Chicken, who was apt to be jealous of his ascendancy, eyed Captain Cuttle with anything but favour as he took leave of Mr Toots, but followed his patron without being otherwise demonstrative of his ill-will: leaving the Captain oppressed with sorrow; and Rob the Grinder elevated with joy, on account of having had the honour of staring for nearly half an hour at the conqueror of the Nobby Shropshire One.

Long after Rob was fast asleep in his bed under the counter, the Captain sat looking at the fire; and long after there was no fire to look at, the Captain sat gazing on the rusty bars, with unavailing thoughts of Walter and old Sol crowding through his mind. Retirement to the stormy chamber at the top of the house brought no rest with it; and the Captain rose up in the morning, sorrowful and unrefreshed.

As soon as the City offices were opened, the Captain issued forth to the counting-house of Dombey and Son. But there was no opening of the Midshipman's windows that morning. Rob the Grinder, by the Captain's orders, left the shutters closed, and the house was as a house of death.

It chanced that Mr Carker was entering the office, as Captain Cuttle arrived at the door. Receiving the Manager's benison gravely and silently, Captain Cuttle made bold to accompany him into his own room.

'Well, Captain Cuttle,' said Mr Carker, taking up his usual position before the fireplace, and keeping on his hat, 'this is a bad business.'

'You have received the news as was in print yesterday, Sir?' said the Captain.

'Yes,' said Mr Carker, 'we have received it! It was accurately stated. The underwriters suffer a considerable loss. We are very sorry. No help! Such is life!'

Mr Carker pared his nails delicately with a penknife, and smiled at the Captain, who was standing by the door looking at him.

'I excessively regret poor Gay,' said Carker, 'and the crew. I understand there were some of our very best men among 'em. It always happens so. Many men with families too. A comfort to reflect that poor Gay had no family, Captain Cuttle!'

The Captain stood rubbing his chin, and looking at the Manager. The Manager glanced at the unopened letters lying on his desk, and took up the newspaper.

'Is there anything I can do for you, Captain Cuttle?' he asked looking off it, with a smiling and expressive glance at the door.

'I wish you could set my mind at rest, Sir, on something it's uneasy about,' returned the Captain.

'Ay!' exclaimed the Manager, 'what's that? Come, Captain Cuttle, I must trouble you to be quick, if you please. I am much engaged.'

'Lookee here, Sir,' said the Captain, advancing a step. 'Afore my friend Wal'r went on this here disastrous voyage -

'Come, come, Captain Cuttle,' interposed the smiling Manager, 'don't talk about disastrous voyages in that way. We have nothing to do with disastrous voyages here, my good fellow. You must have begun very early on your day's allowance, Captain, if you don't remember that there are hazards in all voyages, whether by sea or land. You are not made uneasy by the supposition that young what's-his-name was lost in bad weather that was got up against him in these offices - are you? Fie, Captain! Sleep, and soda-water, are the best cures for such uneasiness as that.

'My lad,' returned the Captain, slowly - 'you are a'most a lad to me, and so I don't ask your pardon for that slip of a word, - if you find any pleasure in this here sport, you ain't the gentleman I took you for. And if you ain't the gentleman I took you for, may be my mind has call to be uneasy. Now this is what it is, Mr Carker. - Afore that poor lad went away, according to orders, he told me that he warn't a going away for his own good, or for promotion, he know'd. It was my belief

that he was wrong, and I told him so, and I come here, your head governor being absent, to ask a question or two of you in a civil way, for my own satisfaction. Them questions you answered - free. Now it'll ease my mind to know, when all is over, as it is, and when what can't be cured must be endoored - for which, as a scholar, you'll overhaul the book it's in, and thereof make a note - to know once more, in a word, that I warn't mistaken; that I warn't back'ard in my duty when I didn't tell the old man what Wal'r told me; and that the wind was truly in his sail, when he highsted of it for Barbados Harbour. Mr Carker,' said the Captain, in the goodness of his nature, 'when I was here last, we was very pleasant together. If I ain't been altogether so pleasant myself this morning, on account of this poor lad, and if I have chafed again any observation of yours that I might have fended off, my name is Ed'ard Cuttle, and I ask your pardon.'

'Captain Cuttle,' returned the Manager, with all possible politeness, 'I must ask you to do me a favour.'

'And what is it, Sir?' inquired the Captain.

'To have the goodness to walk off, if you please,' rejoined the Manager, stretching forth his arm, 'and to carry your jargon somewhere else.'

Every knob in the Captain's face turned white with astonishment and indignation; even the red rim on his forehead faded, like a rainbow among the gathering clouds.

'I tell you what, Captain Cuttle,' said the Manager, shaking his forefinger at him, and showing him all his teeth, but still amiably smiling, 'I was much too lenient with you when you came here before. You belong to an artful and audacious set of people. In my desire to save young what's-his-name from being kicked out of this place, neck and crop, my good Captain, I tolerated you; but for once, and only once. Now, go, my friend!'

The Captain was absolutely rooted to the ground, and speechless -

'Go,' said the good-humoured Manager, gathering up his skirts, and standing astride upon the hearth-rug, 'like a sensible fellow, and let us have no turning out, or any such violent measures. If Mr Dombey were here, Captain, you might be obliged to leave in a more ignominious manner, possibly. I merely say, Go!'

The Captain, laying his ponderous hand upon his chest, to assist himself in fetching a deep breath, looked at Mr Carker from head to foot, and looked round the little room, as if he did not clearly understand where he was, or in what company.

'You are deep, Captain Cuttle,' pursued Carker, with the easy and vivacious frankness of a man of the world who knew the world too well to be ruffled by any discovery of misdoing, when it did not immediately concern himself, 'but you are not quite out of soundings, either - neither you nor your absent friend, Captain. What have you done with your absent friend, hey?'

Again the Captain laid his hand upon his chest. After drawing another deep breath, he conjured himself to 'stand by!' But In a whisper.

'You hatch nice little plots, and hold nice little councils, and make nice little appointments, and receive nice little visitors, too, Captain, hey?' said Carker, bending his brows upon him, without showing his teeth any the less: 'but it's a bold measure to come here afterwards. Not like your discretion! You conspirators, and hiders, and runners-away, should know better than that. Will you oblige me by going?'

'My lad,' gasped the Captain, in a choked and trembling voice, and with a curious action going on in the ponderous fist; 'there's a many words I could wish to say to you, but I don't rightly know where they're stowed just at present. My young friend, Wal'r, was drowned only last night, according to my reckoning, and it puts me out, you see. But you and me will come alongside o'one another again, my lad,' said the Captain, holding up his hook, if we live.'

'It will be anything but shrewd in you, my good fellow, if we do,' returned the Manager, with the same frankness; 'for you may rely, I give you fair warning, upon my detecting and exposing you. I don't pretend to be a more moral man than my neighbours, my good Captain; but the confidence of this House, or of any member of this House, is not to be abused and undermined while I have eyes and ears. Good day!' said Mr Carker, nodding his head.

Captain Cuttle, looking at him steadily (Mr Carker looked full as steadily at the Captain), went out of the office and left him standing astride before the fire, as calm and pleasant as if there were no more spots upon his soul than on his pure white linen, and his smooth sleek skin.

The Captain glanced, in passing through the outer counting-house, at the desk where he knew poor Walter had been used to sit, now occupied by another young boy, with a face almost as fresh and hopeful as his on the day when they tapped the famous last bottle but one of the old Madeira, in the little back parlour. The nation of ideas, thus awakened, did the Captain a great deal of good; it softened him in the very height of his anger, and brought the tears into his eyes.

Arrived at the wooden Midshipman's again, and sitting down in a corner of the dark shop, the Captain's indignation, strong as it was, could make no head against his grief. Passion seemed not only to do wrong and violence to the memory of the dead, but to be infected by death, and to droop and decline beside it. All the living knaves and liars in the world, were nothing to the honesty and truth of one dead friend.

The only thing the honest Captain made out clearly, in this state of mind, besides the loss of Walter, was, that with him almost the whole world of Captain Cuttle had been drowned. If he reproached himself sometimes, and keenly too, for having ever connived at Walter's innocent deceit, he thought at least as often of the Mr Carker whom no sea could ever render up; and the Mr Dombey, whom he now began to perceive was as far beyond human recall; and the 'Heart's Delight,' with whom he must never foregather again; and the Lovely Peg, that teak-built and trim ballad, that had gone ashore upon a rock, and split into mere planks and beams of rhyme. The Captain sat in the dark shop, thinking of these things, to the entire exclusion of his own injury; and looking with as sad an eye upon the ground, as if in contemplation of their actual fragments, as they floated past

But the Captain was not unmindful, for all that, of such decent and rest observances in memory of poor Walter, as he felt within his power. Rousing himself, and rousing Rob the Grinder (who in the unnatural twilight was fast asleep), the Captain sallied forth with his attendant at his heels, and the door-key in his pocket, and repairing to one of those convenient slop-selling establishments of which there is abundant choice at the eastern end of London, purchased on the spot two suits of mourning - one for Rob the Grinder, which was immensely too small, and one for himself, which was immensely too large. He also provided Rob with a species of hat, greatly to be admired for its symmetry and usefulness, as well as for a happy blending of the mariner with the coal-heaver; which is usually termed a sou'wester; and which was something of a novelty in connexion with the instrument business. In their several garments, which the vendor declared to be such a miracle in point of fit as nothing but a rare combination of fortuitous circumstances ever brought about, and the fashion of which was unparalleled within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, the Captain and Grinder immediately arrayed themselves: presenting a spectacle fraught with wonder to all who beheld it.

In this altered form, the Captain received Mr Toots. 'I'm took aback, my lad, at present,' said the Captain, 'and will only confirm that there ill news. Tell the young woman to break it gentle to the young lady, and for neither of 'em never to think of me no more - 'special, mind you, that is - though I will think of them, when night comes on a

hurricane and seas is mountains rowling, for which overhaul your Doctor Watts, brother, and when found make a note on.'

The Captain reserved, until some fitter time, the consideration of Mr Toots's offer of friendship, and thus dismissed him. Captain Cuttle's spirits were so low, in truth, that he half determined, that day, to take no further precautions against surprise from Mrs MacStinger, but to abandon himself recklessly to chance, and be indifferent to what might happen. As evening came on, he fell into a better frame of mind, however; and spoke much of Walter to Rob the Grinder, whose attention and fidelity he likewise incidentally commended. Rob did not blush to hear the Captain earnest in his praises, but sat staring at him, and affecting to snivel with sympathy, and making a feint of being virtuous, and treasuring up every word he said (like a young spy as he was) with very promising deceit.

When Rob had turned in, and was fast asleep, the Captain trimmed the candle, put on his spectacles - he had felt it appropriate to take to spectacles on entering into the Instrument Trade, though his eyes were like a hawk's - and opened the prayer-book at the Burial Service. And reading softly to himself, in the little back parlour, and stopping now and then to wipe his eyes, the Captain, In a true and simple spirit, committed Walter's body to the deep.