

Chapter XLII - Confidential and Accidental

Attired no more in Captain Cuttle's sable slops and sou'-wester hat, but dressed in a substantial suit of brown livery, which, while it affected to be a very sober and demure livery indeed, was really as self-satisfied and confident a one as tailor need desire to make, Rob the Grinder, thus transformed as to his outer man, and all regardless within of the Captain and the Midshipman, except when he devoted a few minutes of his leisure time to crowing over those inseparable worthies, and recalling, with much applauding music from that brazen instrument, his conscience, the triumphant manner in which he had disembarrassed himself of their company, now served his patron, Mr Carker. Inmate of Mr Carker's house, and serving about his person, Rob kept his round eyes on the white teeth with fear and trembling, and felt that he had need to open them wider than ever.

He could not have quaked more, through his whole being, before the teeth, though he had come into the service of some powerful enchanter, and they had been his strongest spells. The boy had a sense of power and authority in this patron of his that engrossed his whole attention and exacted his most implicit submission and obedience. He hardly considered himself safe in thinking about him when he was absent, lest he should feel himself immediately taken by the throat again, as on the morning when he first became bound to him, and should see every one of the teeth finding him out, and taxing him with every fancy of his mind. Face to face with him, Rob had no more doubt that Mr Carker read his secret thoughts, or that he could read them by the least exertion of his will if he were so inclined, than he had that Mr Carker saw him when he looked at him. The ascendancy was so complete, and held him in such enthrallment, that, hardly daring to think at all, but with his mind filled with a constantly dilating impression of his patron's irresistible command over him, and power of doing anything with him, he would stand watching his pleasure, and trying to anticipate his orders, in a state of mental suspension, as to all other things.

Rob had not informed himself perhaps - in his then state of mind it would have been an act of no common temerity to inquire - whether he yielded so completely to this influence in any part, because he had floating suspicions of his patron's being a master of certain treacherous arts in which he had himself been a poor scholar at the Grinders' School. But certainly Rob admired him, as well as feared him. Mr Carker, perhaps, was better acquainted with the sources of his power, which lost nothing by his management of it.

On the very night when he left the Captain's service, Rob, after disposing of his pigeons, and even making a bad bargain in his hurry, had gone straight down to Mr Carker's house, and hotly presented

himself before his new master with a glowing face that seemed to expect commendation.

'What, scapegrace!' said Mr Carker, glancing at his bundle 'Have you left your situation and come to me?'

'Oh if you please, Sir,' faltered Rob, 'you said, you know, when I come here last - '

'I said,' returned Mr Carker, 'what did I say?'

'If you please, Sir, you didn't say nothing at all, Sir,' returned Rob, warned by the manner of this inquiry, and very much disconcerted.

His patron looked at him with a wide display of gums, and shaking his forefinger, observed:

'You'll come to an evil end, my vagabond friend, I foresee. There's ruin in store for you.

'Oh if you please, don't, Sir!' cried Rob, with his legs trembling under him. 'I'm sure, Sir, I only want to work for you, Sir, and to wait upon you, Sir, and to do faithful whatever I'm bid, Sir.'

'You had better do faithfully whatever you are bid,' returned his patron, 'if you have anything to do with me.'

'Yes, I know that, Sir,' pleaded the submissive Rob; 'I'm sure of that, Sir. If you'll only be so good as try me, Sir! And if ever you find me out, Sir, doing anything against your wishes, I give you leave to kill me.'

'You dog!' said Mr Carker, leaning back in his chair, and smiling at him serenely. 'That's nothing to what I'd do to you, if you tried to deceive me.'

'Yes, Sir,' replied the abject Grinder, 'I'm sure you would be down upon me dreadful, Sir. I wouldn't attempt for to go and do it, Sir, not if I was bribed with golden guineas.'

Thoroughly checked in his expectations of commendation, the crestfallen Grinder stood looking at his patron, and vainly endeavouring not to look at him, with the uneasiness which a cur will often manifest in a similar situation.

'So you have left your old service, and come here to ask me to take you into mine, eh?' said Mr Carker.

'Yes, if you please, Sir,' returned Rob, who, in doing so, had acted on his patron's own instructions, but dared not justify himself by the least insinuation to that effect.

'Well!' said Mr Carker. 'You know me, boy?'

'Please, Sir, yes, Sir,' returned Rob, tumbling with his hat, and still fixed by Mr Carker's eye, and fruitlessly endeavouring to unfix himself.

Mr Carker nodded. 'Take care, then!'

Rob expressed in a number of short bows his lively understanding of this caution, and was bowing himself back to the door, greatly relieved by the prospect of getting on the outside of it, when his patron stopped him.

'Halloa!' he cried, calling him roughly back. 'You have been - shut that door.'

Rob obeyed as if his life had depended on his alacrity.

'You have been used to eaves-dropping. Do you know what that means?'

'Listening, Sir?' Rob hazarded, after some embarrassed reflection.

His patron nodded. 'And watching, and so forth.'

'I wouldn't do such a thing here, Sir,' answered Rob; 'upon my word and honour, I wouldn't, Sir, I wish I may die if I would, Sir, for anything that could be promised to me. I should consider it is as much as all the world was worth, to offer to do such a thing, unless I was ordered, Sir.'

'You had better not' You have been used, too, to babbling and tattling,' said his patron with perfect coolness. 'Beware of that here, or you're a lost rascal,' and he smiled again, and again cautioned him with his forefinger.

The Grinder's breath came short and thick with consternation. He tried to protest the purity of his intentions, but could only stare at the smiling gentleman in a stupor of submission, with which the smiling gentleman seemed well enough satisfied, for he ordered him downstairs, after observing him for some moments in silence, and gave him to understand that he was retained in his employment. This was the manner of Rob the Grinder's engagement by Mr Carker, and

his awe-stricken devotion to that gentleman had strengthened and increased, if possible, with every minute of his service.

It was a service of some months' duration, when early one morning, Rob opened the garden gate to Mr Dombey, who was come to breakfast with his master, by appointment. At the same moment his master himself came, hurrying forth to receive the distinguished guest, and give him welcome with all his teeth.

'I never thought,' said Carker, when he had assisted him to alight from his horse, 'to see you here, I'm sure. This is an extraordinary day in my calendar. No occasion is very special to a man like you, who may do anything; but to a man like me, the case is widely different.

'You have a tasteful place here, Carker,' said Mr Dombey, condescending to stop upon the lawn, to look about him.

'You can afford to say so,' returned Carker. 'Thank you.'

'Indeed,' said Mr Dombey, in his lofty patronage, 'anyone might say so. As far as it goes, it is a very commodious and well-arranged place - quite elegant.'

'As far as it goes, truly,' returned Carker, with an air of disparagement 'It wants that qualification. Well! we have said enough about it; and though you can afford to praise it, I thank you nonetheless. Will you walk in?'

Mr Dombey, entering the house, noticed, as he had reason to do, the complete arrangement of the rooms, and the numerous contrivances for comfort and effect that abounded there. Mr Carker, in his ostentation of humility, received this notice with a deferential smile, and said he understood its delicate meaning, and appreciated it, but in truth the cottage was good enough for one in his position - better, perhaps, than such a man should occupy, poor as it was.

'But perhaps to you, who are so far removed, it really does look better than it is,' he said, with his false mouth distended to its fullest stretch. 'Just as monarchs imagine attractions in the lives of beggars.'

He directed a sharp glance and a sharp smile at Mr Dombey as he spoke, and a sharper glance, and a sharper smile yet, when Mr Dombey, drawing himself up before the fire, in the attitude so often copied by his second in command, looked round at the pictures on the walls. Cursorily as his cold eye wandered over them, Carker's keen glance accompanied his, and kept pace with his, marking exactly where it went, and what it saw. As it rested on one picture in particular, Carker hardly seemed to breathe, his sidelong scrutiny was

so cat-like and vigilant, but the eye of his great chief passed from that, as from the others, and appeared no more impressed by it than by the rest.

Carker looked at it - it was the picture that resembled Edith - as if it were a living thing; and with a wicked, silent laugh upon his face, that seemed in part addressed to it, though it was all derisive of the great man standing so unconscious beside him. Breakfast was soon set upon the table; and, inviting Mr Dombey to a chair which had its back towards this picture, he took his own seat opposite to it as usual.

Mr Dombey was even graver than it was his custom to be, and quite silent. The parrot, swinging in the gilded hoop within her gaudy cage, attempted in vain to attract notice, for Carker was too observant of his visitor to heed her; and the visitor, abstracted in meditation, looked fixedly, not to say sullenly, over his stiff neckcloth, without raising his eyes from the table-cloth. As to Rob, who was in attendance, all his faculties and energies were so locked up in observation of his master, that he scarcely ventured to give shelter to the thought that the visitor was the great gentleman before whom he had been carried as a certificate of the family health, in his childhood, and to whom he had been indebted for his leather smalls.

'Allow me,' said Carker suddenly, 'to ask how Mrs Dombey is?'

He leaned forward obsequiously, as he made the inquiry, with his chin resting on his hand; and at the same time his eyes went up to the picture, as if he said to it, 'Now, see, how I will lead him on!'

Mr Dombey reddened as he answered:

'Mrs Dombey is quite well. You remind me, Carker, of some conversation that I wish to have with you.'

'Robin, you can leave us,' said his master, at whose mild tones Robin started and disappeared, with his eyes fixed on his patron to the last. 'You don't remember that boy, of course?' he added, when the enmeshed Grinder was gone.

'No,' said Mr Dombey, with magnificent indifference.

'Not likely that a man like you would. Hardly possible,' murmured Carker. 'But he is one of that family from whom you took a nurse. Perhaps you may remember having generously charged yourself with his education?'

'Is it that boy?' said Mr Dombey, with a frown. 'He does little credit to his education, I believe.'

'Why, he is a young rip, I am afraid,' returned Carker, with a shrug. 'He bears that character. But the truth is, I took him into my service because, being able to get no other employment, he conceived (had been taught at home, I daresay) that he had some sort of claim upon you, and was constantly trying to dog your heels with his petition. And although my defined and recognised connexion with your affairs is merely of a business character, still I have that spontaneous interest in everything belonging to you, that - '

He stopped again, as if to discover whether he had led Mr Dombey far enough yet. And again, with his chin resting on his hand, he leered at the picture.

'Carker,' said Mr Dombey, 'I am sensible that you do not limit your - '

'Service,' suggested his smiling entertainer.

'No; I prefer to say your regard,' observed Mr Dombey; very sensible, as he said so, that he was paying him a handsome and flattering compliment, 'to our mere business relations. Your consideration for my feelings, hopes, and disappointments, in the little instance you have just now mentioned, is an example in point. I I am obliged to you, Carker.'

Mr Carker bent his head slowly, and very softly rubbed his hands, as if he were afraid by any action to disturb the current of Mr Dombey's confidence.

'Your allusion to it is opportune,' said Mr Dombey, after a little hesitation; 'for it prepares the way to what I was beginning to say to you, and reminds me that that involves no absolutely new relations between us, although it may involve more personal confidence on my part than I have hitherto - '

'Distinguished me with,' suggested Carker, bending his head again: 'I will not say to you how honoured I am; for a man like you well knows how much honour he has in his power to bestow at pleasure.'

'Mrs Dombey and myself,' said Mr Dombey, passing this compliment with august self-denial, 'are not quite agreed upon some points. We do not appear to understand each other yet' Mrs Dombey has something to learn.'

'Mrs Dombey is distinguished by many rare attractions; and has been accustomed, no doubt, to receive much adulation,' said the smooth, sleek watcher of his slightest look and tone. 'But where there is affection, duty, and respect, any little mistakes engendered by such causes are soon set right.'

Mr Dombey's thoughts instinctively flew back to the face that had looked at him in his wife's dressing-room when an imperious hand was stretched towards the door; and remembering the affection, duty, and respect, expressed in it, he felt the blood rush to his own face quite as plainly as the watchful eyes upon him saw it there.

'Mrs Dombey and myself,' he went on to say, 'had some discussion, before Mrs Skewton's death, upon the causes of my dissatisfaction; of which you will have formed a general understanding from having been a witness of what passed between Mrs Dombey and myself on the evening when you were at our - at my house.'

'When I so much regretted being present,' said the smiling Carker. 'Proud as a man in my position nay must be of your familiar notice - though I give you no credit for it; you may do anything you please without losing caste - and honoured as I was by an early presentation to Mrs Dombey, before she was made eminent by bearing your name, I almost regretted that night, I assure you, that I had been the object of such especial good fortune'

That any man could, under any possible circumstances, regret the being distinguished by his condescension and patronage, was a moral phenomenon which Mr Dombey could not comprehend. He therefore responded, with a considerable accession of dignity. 'Indeed! And why, Carker?'

'I fear,' returned the confidential agent, 'that Mrs Dombey, never very much disposed to regard me with favourable interest - one in my position could not expect that, from a lady naturally proud, and whose pride becomes her so well - may not easily forgive my innocent part in that conversation. Your displeasure is no light matter, you must remember; and to be visited with it before a third party -

'Carker,' said Mr Dombey, arrogantly; 'I presume that I am the first consideration?'

'Oh! Can there be a doubt about it?' replied the other, with the impatience of a man admitting a notorious and incontrovertible fact'

'Mrs Dombey becomes a secondary consideration, when we are both in question, I imagine,' said Mr Dombey. 'Is that so?'

'Is it so?' returned Carker. 'Do you know better than anyone, that you have no need to ask?'

'Then I hope, Carker,' said Mr Dombey, 'that your regret in the acquisition of Mrs Dombey's displeasure, may be almost

counterbalanced by your satisfaction in retaining my confidence and good opinion.'

'I have the misfortune, I find,' returned Carker, 'to have incurred that displeasure. Mrs Dombey has expressed it to you?'

'Mrs Dombey has expressed various opinions,' said Mr Dombey, with majestic coldness and indifference, 'in which I do not participate, and which I am not inclined to discuss, or to recall. I made Mr's Dombey acquainted, some time since, as I have already told you, with certain points of domestic deference and submission on which I felt it necessary to insist. I failed to convince Mrs Dombey of the expediency of her immediately altering her conduct in those respects, with a view to her own peace and welfare, and my dignity; and I informed Mrs Dombey that if I should find it necessary to object or remonstrate again, I should express my opinion to her through yourself, my confidential agent.'

Blended with the look that Carker bent upon him, was a devilish look at the picture over his head, that struck upon it like a flash of lightning.

'Now, Carker,' said Mr Dombey, 'I do not hesitate to say to you that I will carry my point. I am not to be trifled with. Mrs Dombey must understand that my will is law, and that I cannot allow of one exception to the whole rule of my life. You will have the goodness to undertake this charge, which, coming from me, is not unacceptable to you, I hope, whatever regret you may politely profess - for which I am obliged to you on behalf of Mrs Dombey; and you will have the goodness, I am persuaded, to discharge it as exactly as any other commission.'

'You know,' said Mr Carker, 'that you have only to command me.'

'I know,' said Mr Dombey, with a majestic indication of assent, 'that I have only to command you. It is necessary that I should proceed in this. Mrs Dombey is a lady undoubtedly highly qualified, in many respects, to -

'To do credit even to your choice,' suggested Carker, with a yawning show of teeth.

'Yes; if you please to adopt that form of words,' said Mr Dombey, in his tone of state; 'and at present I do not conceive that Mrs Dombey does that credit to it, to which it is entitled. There is a principle of opposition in Mrs Dombey that must be eradicated; that must be overcome: Mrs Dombey does not appear to understand,' said Mr

Dombey, forcibly, 'that the idea of opposition to Me is monstrous and absurd.'

'We, in the City, know you better,' replied Carker, with a smile from ear to ear.

'You know me better,' said Mr Dombey. 'I hope so. Though, indeed, I am bound to do Mrs Dombey the justice of saying, however inconsistent it may seem with her subsequent conduct (which remains unchanged), that on my expressing my disapprobation and determination to her, with some severity, on the occasion to which I have referred, my admonition appeared to produce a very powerful effect.' Mr Dombey delivered himself of those words with most portentous stateliness. 'I wish you to have the goodness, then, to inform Mrs Dombey, Carker, from me, that I must recall our former conversation to her remembrance, in some surprise that it has not yet had its effect. That I must insist upon her regulating her conduct by the injunctions laid upon her in that conversation. That I am not satisfied with her conduct. That I am greatly dissatisfied with it. And that I shall be under the very disagreeable necessity of making you the bearer of yet more unwelcome and explicit communications, if she has not the good sense and the proper feeling to adapt herself to my wishes, as the first Mrs Dombey did, and, I believe I may add, as any other lady in her place would.'

'The first Mrs Dombey lived very happily,' said Carker.

'The first Mrs Dombey had great good sense,' said Mr Dombey, in a gentlemanly toleration of the dead, 'and very correct feeling.'

'Is Miss Dombey like her mother, do you think?' said Carker.

Swiftly and darkly, Mr Dombey's face changed. His confidential agent eyed it keenly.

'I have approached a painful subject,' he said, in a soft regretful tone of voice, irreconcilable with his eager eye. 'Pray forgive me. I forget these chains of association in the interest I have. Pray forgive me.'

But for all he said, his eager eye scanned Mr Dombey's downcast face none the less closely; and then it shot a strange triumphant look at the picture, as appealing to it to bear witness how he led him on again, and what was coming.

Carker,' said Mr Dombey, looking here and there upon the table, and saying in a somewhat altered and more hurried voice, and with a paler lip, 'there is no occasion for apology. You mistake. The association is with the matter in hand, and not with any recollection, as you

suppose. I do not approve of Mrs Dombey's behaviour towards my daughter.'

'Pardon me,' said Mr Carker, 'I don't quite understand.'

'Understand then,' returned Mr Dombey, 'that you may make that - that you will make that, if you please - matter of direct objection from me to Mrs Dombey. You will please to tell her that her show of devotion for my daughter is disagreeable to me. It is likely to be noticed. It is likely to induce people to contrast Mrs Dombey in her relation towards my daughter, with Mrs Dombey in her relation towards myself. You will have the goodness to let Mrs Dombey know, plainly, that I object to it; and that I expect her to defer, immediately, to my objection. Mrs Dombey may be in earnest, or she may be pursuing a whim, or she may be opposing me; but I object to it in any case, and in every case. If Mrs Dombey is in earnest, so much the less reluctant should she be to desist; for she will not serve my daughter by any such display. If my wife has any superfluous gentleness, and duty over and above her proper submission to me, she may bestow them where she pleases, perhaps; but I will have submission first! - Carker,' said Mr Dombey, checking the unusual emotion with which he had spoken, and falling into a tone more like that in which he was accustomed to assert his greatness, 'you will have the goodness not to omit or slur this point, but to consider it a very important part of your instructions.'

Mr Carker bowed his head, and rising from the table, and standing thoughtfully before the fire, with his hand to his smooth chin, looked down at Mr Dombey with the evil slyness of some monkish carving, half human and half brute; or like a leering face on an old water-spout. Mr Dombey, recovering his composure by degrees, or cooling his emotion in his sense of having taken a high position, sat gradually stiffening again, and looking at the parrot as she swung to and fro, in her great wedding ring.

'I beg your pardon,' said Carker, after a silence, suddenly resuming his chair, and drawing it opposite to Mr Dombey's, 'but let me understand. Mrs Dombey is aware of the probability of your making me the organ of your displeasure?'

'Yes,' replied Mr Dombey. 'I have said so.'

'Yes,' rejoined Carker, quickly; 'but why?'

'Why!' Mr Dombey repeated, not without hesitation. 'Because I told her.'

'Ay,' replied Carker. 'But why did you tell her? You see,' he continued with a smile, and softly laying his velvet hand, as a cat might have laid its sheathed claws, on Mr Dombey's arm; 'if I perfectly understand what is in your mind, I am so much more likely to be useful, and to have the happiness of being effectually employed. I think I do understand. I have not the honour of Mrs Dombey's good opinion. In my position, I have no reason to expect it; but I take the fact to be, that I have not got it?'

'Possibly not,' said Mr Dombey.

'Consequently,' pursued Carker, 'your making the communications to Mrs Dombey through me, is sure to be particularly unpalatable to that lady?'

'It appears to me,' said Mr Dombey, with haughty reserve, and yet with some embarrassment, 'that Mrs Dombey's views upon the subject form no part of it as it presents itself to you and me, Carker. But it may be so.'

'And - pardon me - do I misconceive you,' said Carker, 'when I think you descry in this, a likely means of humbling Mrs Dombey's pride - I use the word as expressive of a quality which, kept within due bounds, adorns and graces a lady so distinguished for her beauty and accomplishments - and, not to say of punishing her, but of reducing her to the submission you so naturally and justly require?'

'I am not accustomed, Carker, as you know,' said Mr Dombey, 'to give such close reasons for any course of conduct I think proper to adopt, but I will gainsay nothing of this. If you have any objection to found upon it, that is indeed another thing, and the mere statement that you have one will be sufficient. But I have not supposed, I confess, that any confidence I could entrust to you, would be likely to degrade you -'

'Oh! I degraded!' exclaimed Carker. 'In your service!'

'or to place you,' pursued Mr Dombey, 'in a false position.'

'I in a false position!' exclaimed Carker. 'I shall be proud - delighted - to execute your trust. I could have wished, I own, to have given the lady at whose feet I would lay my humble duty and devotion - for is she not your wife! - no new cause of dislike; but a wish from you is, of course, paramount to every other consideration on earth. Besides, when Mrs Dombey is converted from these little errors of judgment, incidental, I would presume to say, to the novelty of her situation, I shall hope that she will perceive in the slight part I take, only a grain - my removed and different sphere gives room for little more - of the

respect for you, and sacrifice of all considerations to you, of which it will be her pleasure and privilege to garner up a great store every day.'

Mr Dombey seemed, at the moment, again to see her with her hand stretched out towards the door, and again to hear through the mild speech of his confidential agent an echo of the words, 'Nothing can make us stranger to each other than we are henceforth!' But he shook off the fancy, and did not shake in his resolution, and said, 'Certainly, no doubt.'

'There is nothing more,' quoth Carker, drawing his chair back to its old place - for they had taken little breakfast as yet- and pausing for an answer before he sat down.

'Nothing,' said Mr Dombey, 'but this. You will be good enough to observe, Carker, that no message to Mrs Dombey with which you are or may be charged, admits of reply. You will be good enough to bring me no reply. Mrs Dombey is informed that it does not become me to temporise or treat upon any matter that is at issue between us, and that what I say is final.'

Mr Carker signified his understanding of these credentials, and they fell to breakfast with what appetite they might. The Grinder also, in due time reappeared, keeping his eyes upon his master without a moment's respite, and passing the time in a reverie of worshipful tenor. Breakfast concluded, Mr Dombey's horse was ordered out again, and Mr Carker mounting his own, they rode off for the City together.

Mr Carker was in capital spirits, and talked much. Mr Dombey received his conversation with the sovereign air of a man who had a right to be talked to, and occasionally condescended to throw in a few words to carry on the conversation. So they rode on characteristically enough. But Mr Dombey, in his dignity, rode with very long stirrups, and a very loose rein, and very rarely deigned to look down to see where his horse went. In consequence of which it happened that Mr Dombey's horse, while going at a round trot, stumbled on some loose stones, threw him, rolled over him, and lashing out with his iron-shod feet, in his struggles to get up, kicked him.

Mr Carker, quick of eye, steady of hand, and a good horseman, was afoot, and had the struggling animal upon his legs and by the bridle, in a moment. Otherwise that morning's confidence would have been Mr Dombey's last. Yet even with the flush and hurry of this action red upon him, he bent over his prostrate chief with every tooth disclosed, and muttered as he stooped down, 'I have given good cause of offence to Mrs Dombey now, if she knew it!'

Mr Dombey being insensible, and bleeding from the head and face, was carried by certain menders of the road, under Carker's direction, to the nearest public-house, which was not far off, and where he was soon attended by divers surgeons, who arrived in quick succession from all parts, and who seemed to come by some mysterious instinct, as vultures are said to gather about a camel who dies in the desert. After being at some pains to restore him to consciousness, these gentlemen examined into the nature of his injuries.

One surgeon who lived hard by was strong for a compound fracture of the leg, which was the landlord's opinion also; but two surgeons who lived at a distance, and were only in that neighbourhood by accident, combated this opinion so disinterestedly, that it was decided at last that the patient, though severely cut and bruised, had broken no bones but a lesser rib or so, and might be carefully taken home before night. His injuries being dressed and bandaged, which was a long operation, and he at length left to repose, Mr Carker mounted his horse again, and rode away to carry the intelligence home.

Crafty and cruel as his face was at the best of times, though it was a sufficiently fair face as to form and regularity of feature, it was at its worst when he set forth on this errand; animated by the craft and cruelty of thoughts within him, suggestions of remote possibility rather than of design or plot, that made him ride as if he hunted men and women. Drawing rein at length, and slackening in his speed, as he came into the more public roads, he checked his white-legged horse into picking his way along as usual, and hid himself beneath his sleek, hushed, crouched manner, and his ivory smile, as he best could.

He rode direct to Mr Dombey's house, alighted at the door, and begged to see Mrs Dombey on an affair of importance. The servant who showed him to Mr Dombey's own room, soon returned to say that it was not Mrs Dombey's hour for receiving visitors, and that he begged pardon for not having mentioned it before.

Mr Carker, who was quite prepared for a cold reception, wrote upon a card that he must take the liberty of pressing for an interview, and that he would not be so bold as to do so, for the second time (this he underlined), if he were not equally sure of the occasion being sufficient for his justification. After a trifling delay, Mrs Dombey's maid appeared, and conducted him to a morning room upstairs, where Edith and Florence were together.

He had never thought Edith half so beautiful before. Much as he admired the graces of her face and form, and freshly as they dwelt within his sensual remembrance, he had never thought her half so beautiful.

Her glance fell haughtily upon him in the doorway; but he looked at Florence - though only in the act of bending his head, as he came in - with some irrepressible expression of the new power he held; and it was his triumph to see the glance droop and falter, and to see that Edith half rose up to receive him.

He was very sorry, he was deeply grieved; he couldn't say with what unwillingness he came to prepare her for the intelligence of a very slight accident. He entreated Mrs Dombey to compose herself. Upon his sacred word of honour, there was no cause of alarm. But Mr Dombey -

Florence uttered a sudden cry. He did not look at her, but at Edith. Edith composed and reassured her. She uttered no cry of distress. No, no.

Mr Dombey had met with an accident in riding. His horse had slipped, and he had been thrown.

Florence wildly exclaimed that he was badly hurt; that he was killed!

No. Upon his honour, Mr Dombey, though stunned at first, was soon recovered, and though certainly hurt was in no kind of danger. If this were not the truth, he, the distressed intruder, never could have had the courage to present himself before Mrs Dombey. It was the truth indeed, he solemnly assured her.

All this he said as if he were answering Edith, and not Florence, and with his eyes and his smile fastened on Edith.

He then went on to tell her where Mr Dombey was lying, and to request that a carriage might be placed at his disposal to bring him home.

'Mama,' faltered Florence in tears, 'if I might venture to go!'

Mr Carker, having his eyes on Edith when he heard these words, gave her a secret look and slightly shook his head. He saw how she battled with herself before she answered him with her handsome eyes, but he wrested the answer from her - he showed her that he would have it, or that he would speak and cut Florence to the heart - and she gave it to him. As he had looked at the picture in the morning, so he looked at her afterwards, when she turned her eyes away.

'I am directed to request,' he said, 'that the new housekeeper - Mrs Pipchin, I think, is the name - '

Nothing escaped him. He saw in an instant, that she was another slight of Mr Dombey's on his wife.

' - may be informed that Mr Dombey wishes to have his bed prepared in his own apartments downstairs, as he prefers those rooms to any other. I shall return to Mr Dombey almost immediately. That every possible attention has been paid to his comfort, and that he is the object of every possible solicitude, I need not assure you, Madam. Let me again say, there is no cause for the least alarm. Even you may be quite at ease, believe me.'

He bowed himself out, with his extremest show of deference and conciliation; and having returned to Mr Dombey's room, and there arranged for a carriage being sent after him to the City, mounted his horse again, and rode slowly thither. He was very thoughtful as he went along, and very thoughtful there, and very thoughtful in the carriage on his way back to the place where Mr Dombey had been left. It was only when sitting by that gentleman's couch that he was quite himself again, and conscious of his teeth.

About the time of twilight, Mr Dombey, grievously afflicted with aches and pains, was helped into his carriage, and propped with cloaks and pillows on one side of it, while his confidential agent bore him company upon the other. As he was not to be shaken, they moved at little more than a foot pace; and hence it was quite dark when he was brought home. Mrs Pipchin, bitter and grim, and not oblivious of the Peruvian mines, as the establishment in general had good reason to know, received him at the door, and freshened the domestics with several little sprinklings of wordy vinegar, while they assisted in conveying him to his room. Mr Carker remained in attendance until he was safe in bed, and then, as he declined to receive any female visitor, but the excellent Ogress who presided over his household, waited on Mrs Dombey once more, with his report on her lord's condition.

He again found Edith alone with Florence, and he again addressed the whole of his soothing speech to Edith, as if she were a prey to the liveliest and most affectionate anxieties. So earnest he was in his respectful sympathy, that on taking leave, he ventured - with one more glance towards Florence at the moment - to take her hand, and bending over it, to touch it with his lips.

Edith did not withdraw the hand, nor did she strike his fair face with it, despite the flush upon her cheek, the bright light in her eyes, and the dilation of her whole form. But when she was alone in her own room, she struck it on the marble chimney-shelf, so that, at one blow, it was bruised, and bled; and held it from her, near the shining fire, as if she could have thrust it in and burned it'

Far into the night she sat alone, by the sinking blaze, in dark and threatening beauty, watching the murky shadows looming on the wall, as if her thoughts were tangible, and cast them there. Whatever shapes of outrage and affront, and black foreshadowings of things that might happen, flickered, indistinct and giant-like, before her, one resented figure marshalled them against her. And that figure was her husband.