

Chapter XLIV - A Separation

With the day, though not so early as the sun, uprose Miss Susan Nipper. There was a heaviness in this young maiden's exceedingly sharp black eyes, that abated somewhat of their sparkling, and suggested - which was not their usual character - the possibility of their being sometimes shut. There was likewise a swollen look about them, as if they had been crying over-night. But the Nipper, so far from being cast down, was singularly brisk and bold, and all her energies appeared to be braced up for some great feat. This was noticeable even in her dress, which was much more tight and trim than usual; and in occasional twitches of her head as she went about the house, which were mightily expressive of determination.

In a word, she had formed a determination, and an aspiring one: it being nothing less than this - to penetrate to Mr Dombey's presence, and have speech of that gentleman alone. 'I have often said I would,' she remarked, in a threatening manner, to herself, that morning, with many twitches of her head, 'and now I will!'

Spurring herself on to the accomplishment of this desperate design, with a sharpness that was peculiar to herself, Susan Nipper haunted the hall and staircase during the whole forenoon, without finding a favourable opportunity for the assault. Not at all baffled by this discomfiture, which indeed had a stimulating effect, and put her on her mettle, she diminished nothing of her vigilance; and at last discovered, towards evening, that her sworn foe Mrs Pipchin, under pretence of having sat up all night, was dozing in her own room, and that Mr Dombey was lying on his sofa, unattended.

With a twitch - not of her head merely, this time, but of her whole self - the Nipper went on tiptoe to Mr Dombey's door, and knocked. 'Come in!' said Mr Dombey. Susan encouraged herself with a final twitch, and went in.

Mr Dombey, who was eyeing the fire, gave an amazed look at his visitor, and raised himself a little on his arm. The Nipper dropped a curtsy.

'What do you want?' said Mr Dombey.

'If you please, Sir, I wish to speak to you,' said Susan.

Mr Dombey moved his lips as if he were repeating the words, but he seemed so lost in astonishment at the presumption of the young woman as to be incapable of giving them utterance.

'I have been in your service, Sir,' said Susan Nipper, with her usual rapidity, 'now twelve 'year a waiting on Miss Floy my own young lady who couldn't speak plain when I first come here and I was old in this house when Mrs Richards was new, I may not be Meethosalem, but I am not a child in arms.'

Mr Dombey, raised upon his arm and looking at her, offered no comment on this preparatory statement of fact.

'There never was a dearer or a blessedder young lady than is my young lady, Sir,' said Susan, 'and I ought to know a great deal better than some for I have seen her in her grief and I have seen her in her joy (there's not been much of it) and I have seen her with her brother and I have seen her in her loneliness and some have never seen her, and I say to some and all - I do!' and here the black-eyed shook her head, and slightly stamped her foot; 'that she's the blessedest and dearest angel is Miss Floy that ever drew the breath of life, the more that I was torn to pieces Sir the more I'd say it though I may not be a Fox's Martyr..'

Mr Dombey turned yet paler than his fall had made him, with indignation and astonishment; and kept his eyes upon the speaker as if he accused them, and his ears too, of playing him false.

'No one could be anything but true and faithful to Miss Floy, Sir,' pursued Susan, 'and I take no merit for my service of twelve year, for I love her - yes, I say to some and all I do!' - and here the black-eyed shook her head again, and slightly stamped her foot again, and checked a sob; 'but true and faithful service gives me right to speak I hope, and speak I must and will now, right or wrong.'

'What do you mean, woman?' said Mr Dombey, glaring at her. 'How do you dare?'

'What I mean, Sir, is to speak respectful and without offence, but out, and how I dare I know not but I do!' said Susan. 'Oh! you don't know my young lady Sir you don't indeed, you'd never know so little of her, if you did.'

Mr Dombey, in a fury, put his hand out for the bell-rope; but there was no bell-rope on that side of the fire, and he could not rise and cross to the other without assistance. The quick eye of the Nipper detected his helplessness immediately, and now, as she afterwards observed, she felt she had got him.

'Miss Floy,' said Susan Nipper, 'is the most devoted and most patient and most dutiful and beautiful of daughters, there ain't no gentleman, no Sir, though as great and rich as all the greatest and richest of

England put together, but might be proud of her and would and ought. If he knew her value right, he'd rather lose his greatness and his fortune piece by piece and beg his way in rags from door to door, I say to some and all, he would!' cried Susan Nipper, bursting into tears, 'than bring the sorrow on her tender heart that I have seen it suffer in this house!'

'Woman,' cried Mr Dombey, 'leave the room.'

'Begging your pardon, not even if I am to leave the situation, Sir,' replied the steadfast Nipper, 'in which I have been so many years and seen so much - although I hope you'd never have the heart to send me from Miss Floy for such a cause - will I go now till I have said the rest, I may not be a Indian widow Sir and I am not and I would not so become but if I once made up my mind to burn myself alive, I'd do it! And I've made my mind up to go on.'

Which was rendered no less clear by the expression of Susan Nipper's countenance, than by her words.

'There ain't a person in your service, Sir,' pursued the black-eyed, 'that has always stood more in awe of you than me and you may think how true it is when I make so bold as say that I have hundreds and hundreds of times thought of speaking to you and never been able to make my mind up to it till last night, but last night decided of me.'

Mr Dombey, in a paroxysm of rage, made another grasp at the bell-rope that was not there, and, in its absence, pulled his hair rather than nothing.

'I have seen,' said Susan Nipper, 'Miss Floy strive and strive when nothing but a child so sweet and patient that the best of women might have copied from her, I've seen her sitting nights together half the night through to help her delicate brother with his learning, I've seen her helping him and watching him at other times - some well know when - I've seen her, with no encouragement and no help, grow up to be a lady, thank God! that is the grace and pride of every company she goes in, and I've always seen her cruelly neglected and keenly feeling of it - I say to some and all, I have! - and never said one word, but ordering one's self lowly and reverently towards one's betters, is not to be a worshipper of graven images, and I will and must speak!'

'Is there anybody there?' cried Mr Dombey, calling out. 'Where are the men? where are the women? Is there no one there?'

'I left my dear young lady out of bed late last night,' said Susan, nothing checked, 'and I knew why, for you was ill Sir and she didn't know how ill and that was enough to make her wretched as I saw it

did. I may not be a Peacock; but I have my eyes - and I sat up a little in my own room thinking she might be lonesome and might want me, and I saw her steal downstairs and come to this door as if it was a guilty thing to look at her own Pa, and then steal back again and go into them lonely drawing-rooms, a-crying so, that I could hardly bear to hear it. I can not bear to hear it,' said Susan Nipper, wiping her black eyes, and fixing them undauntingly on Mr Dombey's infuriated face. 'It's not the first time I have heard it, not by many and many a time you don't know your own daughter, Sir, you don't know what you're doing, Sir, I say to some and all,' cried Susan Nipper, in a final burst, 'that it's a sinful shame!'

'Why, hoity toity!' cried the voice of Mrs Pipchin, as the black bombazeen garments of that fair Peruvian Miner swept into the room. 'What's this, indeed?'

Susan favoured Mrs Pipchin with a look she had invented expressly for her when they first became acquainted, and resigned the reply to Mr Dombey.

'What's this?' repeated Mr Dombey, almost foaming. 'What's this, Madam? You who are at the head of this household, and bound to keep it in order, have reason to inquire. Do you know this woman?'

'I know very little good of her, Sir,' croaked Mrs Pipchin. 'How dare you come here, you hussy? Go along with you!'

But the inflexible Nipper, merely honouring Mrs Pipchin with another look, remained.

'Do you call it managing this establishment, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, 'to leave a person like this at liberty to come and talk to me! A gentleman - in his own house - in his own room - assailed with the impertinences of women-servants!'

'Well, Sir,' returned Mrs Pipchin, with vengeance in her hard grey eye, 'I exceedingly deplore it; nothing can be more irregular; nothing can be more out of all bounds and reason; but I regret to say, Sir, that this young woman is quite beyond control. She has been spoiled by Miss Dombey, and is amenable to nobody. You know you're not,' said Mrs Pipchin, sharply, and shaking her head at Susan Nipper. 'For shame, you hussy! Go along with you!'

'If you find people in my service who are not to be controlled, Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, turning back towards the fire, 'you know what to do with them, I presume. You know what you are here for? Take her away!' 'Sir, I know what to do,' retorted Mrs Pipchin, 'and of

course shall do it' Susan Nipper,' snapping her up particularly short, 'a month's warning from this hour.'

'Oh indeed!' cried Susan, loftily.

'Yes,' returned Mrs Pipchin, 'and don't smile at me, you minx, or I'll know the reason why! Go along with you this minute!'

'I intend to go this minute, you may rely upon it,' said the voluble Nipper. 'I have been in this house waiting on my young lady a dozen year and I won't stop in it one hour under notice from a person owning to the name of Pipchin trust me, Mrs P.'

'A good riddance of bad rubbish!' said that wrathful old lady. 'Get along with you, or I'll have you carried out!'

'My comfort is,' said Susan, looking back at Mr Dombey, 'that I have told a piece of truth this day which ought to have been told long before and can't be told too often or too plain and that no amount of Pipchinses - I hope the number of 'em mayn't be great' (here Mrs Pipchin uttered a very sharp 'Go along with you!' and Miss Nipper repeated the look) 'can unsay what I have said, though they gave a whole year full of warnings beginning at ten o'clock in the forenoon and never leaving off till twelve at night and died of the exhaustion which would be a Jubilee!'

With these words, Miss Nipper preceded her foe out of the room; and walking upstairs to her own apartments in great state, to the choking exasperation of the ireful Pipchin, sat down among her boxes and began to cry.

From this soft mood she was soon aroused, with a very wholesome and refreshing effect, by the voice of Mrs Pipchin outside the door.

'Does that bold-faced slut,' said the fell Pipchin, 'intend to take her warning, or does she not?'

Miss Nipper replied from within that the person described did not inhabit that part of the house, but that her name was Pipchin, and she was to be found in the housekeeper's room.

'You saucy baggage!' retorted Mrs Pipchin, rattling at the handle of the door. 'Go along with you this minute. Pack up your things directly! How dare you talk in this way to a gentle-woman who has seen better days?'

To which Miss Nipper rejoined from her castle, that she pitied the better days that had seen Mrs Pipchin; and that for her part she

considered the worst days in the year to be about that lady's mark, except that they were much too good for her.

'But you needn't trouble yourself to make a noise at my door,' said Susan Nipper, 'nor to contaminate the key-hole with your eye, I'm packing up and going you may take your affidavit.'

The Dowager expressed her lively satisfaction at this intelligence, and with some general opinions upon young hussies as a race, and especially upon their demerits after being spoiled by Miss Dombey, withdrew to prepare the Nipper's wages. Susan then bestirred herself to get her trunks in order, that she might take an immediate and dignified departure; sobbing heartily all the time, as she thought of Florence.

The object of her regret was not long in coming to her, for the news soon spread over the house that Susan Nipper had had a disturbance with Mrs Pipchin, and that they had both appealed to Mr Dombey, and that there had been an unprecedented piece of work in Mr Dombey's room, and that Susan was going. The latter part of this confused rumour, Florence found to be so correct, that Susan had locked the last trunk and was sitting upon it with her bonnet on, when she came into her room.

'Susan!' cried Florence. 'Going to leave me! You!'

'Oh for goodness gracious sake, Miss Floy,' said Susan, sobbing, 'don't speak a word to me or I shall demean myself before them' Pipchinses, and I wouldn't have 'em see me cry Miss Floy for worlds!'

'Susan!' said Florence. 'My dear girl, my old friend! What shall I do without you! Can you bear to go away so?'

'No-n-o-o, my darling dear Miss Floy, I can't indeed,' sobbed Susan. 'But it can't be helped, I've done my duty' Miss, I have indeed. It's no fault of mine. I am quite resigned. I couldn't stay my month or I could never leave you then my darling and I must at last as well as at first, don't speak to me Miss Floy, for though I'm pretty firm I'm not a marble doorpost, my own dear.'

'What is it? Why is it?' said Florence, 'Won't you tell me?' For Susan was shaking her head.

'No-n-no, my darling,' returned Susan. 'Don't ask me, for I mustn't, and whatever you do don't put in a word for me to stop, for it couldn't be and you'd only wrong yourself, and so God bless you my own precious and forgive me any harm I have done, or any temper I have showed in all these many years!'

With which entreaty, very heartily delivered, Susan hugged her mistress in her arms.

'My darling there's a many that may come to serve you and be glad to serve you and who'll serve you well and true,' said Susan, 'but there can't be one who'll serve you so affectionate as me or love you half as dearly, that's my comfort' Good-bye, sweet Miss Floy!

'Where will you go, Susan?' asked her weeping mistress.

'I've got a brother down in the country Miss - a farmer in Essex said the heart-broken Nipper, 'that keeps ever so many co-o-ows and pigs and I shall go down there by the coach and sto-op with him, and don't mind me, for I've got money in the Savings Banks my dear, and needn't take another service just yet, which I couldn't, couldn't, couldn't do, my heart's own mistress!' Susan finished with a burst of sorrow, which was opportunely broken by the voice of Mrs Pipchin talking downstairs; on hearing which, she dried her red and swollen eyes, and made a melancholy feint of calling jauntily to Mr Towlinson to fetch a cab and carry down her boxes.

Florence, pale and hurried and distressed, but withheld from useless interference even here, by her dread of causing any new division between her father and his wife (whose stern, indignant face had been a warning to her a few moments since), and by her apprehension of being in some way unconsciously connected already with the dismissal of her old servant and friend, followed, weeping, downstairs to Edith's dressing-room, whither Susan betook herself to make her parting curtsey.

'Now, here's the cab, and here's the boxes, get along with you, do!' said Mrs Pipchin, presenting herself at the same moment. 'I beg your pardon, Ma'am, but Mr Dombey's orders are imperative.'

Edith, sitting under the hands of her maid - she was going out to dinner - preserved her haughty face, and took not the least notice.

'There's your money,' said Mrs Pipchin, who in pursuance of her system, and in recollection of the Mines, was accustomed to rout the servants about, as she had routed her young Brighton boarders; to the everlasting acidulation of Master Bitherstone, 'and the sooner this house sees your back the better.

Susan had no spirits even for the look that belonged to Ma Pipchin by right; so she dropped her curtsey to Mrs Dombey (who inclined her head without one word, and whose eye avoided everyone but Florence), and gave one last parting hug to her young mistress, and received her parting embrace in return. Poor Susan's face at this

crisis, in the intensity of her feelings and the determined suffocation of her sobs, lest one should become audible and be a triumph to Mrs Pipchin, presented a series of the most extraordinary physiognomical phenomena ever witnessed.

'I beg your pardon, Miss, I'm sure,' said Towlinson, outside the door with the boxes, addressing Florence, 'but Mr Toots is in the drawing-room, and sends his compliments, and begs to know how Diogenes and Master is.'

Quick as thought, Florence glided out and hastened downstairs, where Mr Toots, in the most splendid vestments, was breathing very hard with doubt and agitation on the subject of her coming.

'Oh, how de do, Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, 'God bless my soul!'

This last ejaculation was occasioned by Mr Toots's deep concern at the distress he saw in Florence's face; which caused him to stop short in a fit of chuckles, and become an image of despair.

'Dear Mr Toots,' said Florence, 'you are so friendly to me, and so honest, that I am sure I may ask a favour of you.'

'Miss Dombey,' returned Mr Toots, 'if you'll only name one, you'll - you'll give me an appetite. To which,' said Mr Toots, with some sentiment, 'I have long been a stranger.'

'Susan, who is an old friend of mine, the oldest friend I have,' said Florence, 'is about to leave here suddenly, and quite alone, poor girl. She is going home, a little way into the country. Might I ask you to take care of her until she is in the coach?'

'Miss Dombey,' returned Mr Toots, 'you really do me an honour and a kindness. This proof of your confidence, after the manner in which I was Beast enough to conduct myself at Brighton - '

'Yes,' said Florence, hurriedly - 'no - don't think of that. Then would you have the kindness to - to go? and to be ready to meet her when she comes out? Thank you a thousand times! You ease my mind so much. She doesn't seem so desolate. You cannot think how grateful I feel to you, or what a good friend I am sure you are!' and Florence in her earnestness thanked him again and again; and Mr Toots, in his earnestness, hurried away - but backwards, that he might lose no glimpse of her.

Florence had not the courage to go out, when she saw poor Susan in the hall, with Mrs Pipchin driving her forth, and Diogenes jumping about her, and terrifying Mrs Pipchin to the last degree by making

snaps at her bombazeen skirts, and howling with anguish at the sound of her voice - for the good duenna was the dearest and most cherished aversion of his breast. But she saw Susan shake hands with the servants all round, and turn once to look at her old home; and she saw Diogenes bound out after the cab, and want to follow it, and testify an impossibility of conviction that he had no longer any property in the fare; and the door was shut, and the hurry over, and her tears flowed fast for the loss of an old friend, whom no one could replace. No one. No one.

Mr Toots, like the leal and trusty soul he was, stopped the cabriolet in a twinkling, and told Susan Nipper of his commission, at which she cried more than before.

'Upon my soul and body!' said Mr Toots, taking his seat beside her. 'I feel for you. Upon my word and honour I think you can hardly know your own feelings better than I imagine them. I can conceive nothing more dreadful than to have to leave Miss Dombey.'

Susan abandoned herself to her grief now, and it really was touching to see her.

'I say,' said Mr Toots, 'now, don't! at least I mean now do, you know!'

'Do what, Mr Toots!' cried Susan.

'Why, come home to my place, and have some dinner before you start,' said Mr Toots. 'My cook's a most respectable woman - one of the most motherly people I ever saw - and she'll be delighted to make you comfortable. Her son,' said Mr Toots, as an additional recommendation, 'was educated in the Bluecoat School,' and blown up in a powder-mill.'

Susan accepting this kind offer, Mr Toots conducted her to his dwelling, where they were received by the Matron in question who fully justified his character of her, and by the Chicken who at first supposed, on seeing a lady in the vehicle, that Mr Dombey had been doubled up, ably to his old recommendation, and Miss Dombey abducted. This gentleman awakened in Miss Nipper some considerable astonishment; for, having been defeated by the Larkey Boy, his visage was in a state of such great dilapidation, as to be hardly presentable in society with comfort to the beholders. The Chicken himself attributed this punishment to his having had the misfortune to get into Chancery early in the proceedings, when he was severely fibbed by the Larkey one, and heavily grassed. But it appeared from the published records of that great contest that the Larkey Boy had had it all his own way from the beginning, and that the Chicken had been tapped, and bunged, and had received pepper,

and had been made groggy, and had come up piping, and had endured a complication of similar strange inconveniences, until he had been gone into and finished.

After a good repast, and much hospitality, Susan set out for the coach-office in another cabriolet, with Mr Toots inside, as before, and the Chicken on the box, who, whatever distinction he conferred on the little party by the moral weight and heroism of his character, was scarcely ornamental to it, physically speaking, on account of his plasters; which were numerous. But the Chicken had registered a vow, in secret, that he would never leave Mr Toots (who was secretly pining to get rid of him), for any less consideration than the good-will and fixtures of a public-house; and being ambitious to go into that line, and drink himself to death as soon as possible, he felt it his cue to make his company unacceptable.

The night-coach by which Susan was to go, was on the point of departure. Mr Toots having put her inside, lingered by the window, irresolutely, until the driver was about to mount; when, standing on the step, and putting in a face that by the light of the lamp was anxious and confused, he said abruptly:

'I say, Susan! Miss Dombey, you know - '

'Yes, Sir.'

'Do you think she could - you know - eh?'

'I beg your pardon, Mr Toots,' said Susan, 'but I don't hear you.

'Do you think she could be brought, you know - not exactly at once, but in time - in a long time - to - to love me, you know? There!' said poor Mr Toots.

'Oh dear no!' returned Susan, shaking her head. 'I should say, never. Never!'

'Thank'ee!' said Mr Toots. 'It's of no consequence. Good-night. It's of no consequence, thank'ee!'