## Chapter XLVI - Recognizant And Reflective

Among sundry minor alterations in Mr Carker's life and habits that began to take place at this time, none was more remarkable than the extraordinary diligence with which he applied himself to business, and the closeness with which he investigated every detail that the affairs of the House laid open to him. Always active and penetrating in such matters, his lynx-eyed vigilance now increased twenty-fold. Not only did his weary watch keep pace with every present point that every day presented to him in some new form, but in the midst of these engrossing occupations he found leisure - that is, he made it - to review the past transactions of the Firm, and his share in them, during a long series of years. Frequently when the clerks were all gone, the offices dark and empty, and all similar places of business shut up, Mr Carker, with the whole anatomy of the iron room laid bare before him, would explore the mysteries of books and papers, with the patient progress of a man who was dissecting the minutest nerves and fibres of his subject. Perch, the messenger, who usually remained on these occasions, to entertain himself with the perusal of the Price Current by the light of one candle, or to doze over the fire in the outer office, at the imminent risk every moment of diving head foremost into the coal-box, could not withhold the tribute of his admiration from this zealous conduct, although it much contracted his domestic enjoyments; and again, and again, expatiated to Mrs Perch (now nursing twins) on the industry and acuteness of their managing gentleman in the City.

The same increased and sharp attention that Mr Carker bestowed on the business of the House, he applied to his own personal affairs. Though not a partner in the concern - a distinction hitherto reserved solely to inheritors of the great name of Dombey - he was in the receipt of some percentage on its dealings; and, participating in all its facilities for the employment of money to advantage, was considered, by the minnows among the tritons of the East, a rich man. It began to be said, among these shrewd observers, that Jem Carker, of Dombey's, was looking about him to see what he was worth; and that he was calling in his money at a good time, like the long-headed fellow he was; and bets were even offered on the Stock Exchange that Jem was going to marry a rich widow.

Yet these cares did not in the least interfere with Mr Carker's watching of his chief, or with his cleanness, neatness, sleekness, or any cat-like quality he possessed. It was not so much that there was a change in him, in reference to any of his habits, as that the whole man was intensified. Everything that had been observable in him before, was observable now, but with a greater amount of concentration. He did each single thing, as if he did nothing else - a pretty certain indication

in a man of that range of ability and purpose, that he is doing something which sharpens and keeps alive his keenest powers.

The only decided alteration in him was, that as he rode to and fro along the streets, he would fall into deep fits of musing, like that in which he had come away from Mr Dombey's house, on the morning of that gentleman's disaster. At such times, he would keep clear of the obstacles in his way, mechanically; and would appear to see and hear nothing until arrival at his destination, or some sudden chance or effort roused him.

Walking his white-legged horse thus, to the counting-house of Dombey and Son one day, he was as unconscious of the observation of two pairs of women's eyes, as of the fascinated orbs of Rob the Grinder, who, in waiting a street's length from the appointed place, as a demonstration of punctuality, vainly touched and retouched his hat to attract attention, and trotted along on foot, by his master's side, prepared to hold his stirrup when he should alight.

'See where he goes!' cried one of these two women, an old creature, who stretched out her shrivelled arm to point him out to her companion, a young woman, who stood close beside her, withdrawn like herself into a gateway.

Mrs Brown's daughter looked out, at this bidding on the part of Mrs Brown; and there were wrath and vengeance in her face.

'I never thought to look at him again,' she said, in a low voice; 'but it's well I should, perhaps. I see. I see!'

'Not changed!' said the old woman, with a look of eager malice.

'He changed!' returned the other. 'What for? What has he suffered? There is change enough for twenty in me. Isn't that enough?'

'See where he goes!' muttered the old woman, watching her daughter with her red eyes; 'so easy and so trim a-horseback, while we are in the mud.'

'And of it,' said her daughter impatiently. 'We are mud, underneath his horse's feet. What should we be?'

In the intentness with which she looked after him again, she made a hasty gesture with her hand when the old woman began to reply, as if her view could be obstructed by mere sound. Her mother watching her, and not him, remained silent; until her kindling glance subsided, and she drew a long breath, as if in the relief of his being gone.

'Deary!' said the old woman then. 'Alice! Handsome gall Ally!' She gently shook her sleeve to arouse her attention. 'Will you let him go like that, when you can wring money from him? Why, it's a wickedness, my daughter.'

'Haven't I told you, that I will not have money from him?' she returned. 'And don't you yet believe me? Did I take his sister's money? Would I touch a penny, if I knew it, that had gone through his white hands - unless it was, indeed, that I could poison it, and send it back to him? Peace, mother, and come away.

'And him so rich?' murmured the old woman. 'And us so poor!'

'Poor in not being able to pay him any of the harm we owe him,' returned her daughter. 'Let him give me that sort of riches, and I'll take them from him, and use them. Come away. Its no good looking at his horse. Come away, mother!'

But the old woman, for whom the spectacle of Rob the Grinder returning down the street, leading the riderless horse, appeared to have some extraneous interest that it did not possess in itself, surveyed that young man with the utmost earnestness; and seeming to have whatever doubts she entertained, resolved as he drew nearer, glanced at her daughter with brightened eyes and with her finger on her lip, and emerging from the gateway at the moment of his passing, touched him on the shoulder.

'Why, where's my sprightly Rob been, all this time!' she said, as he turned round.

The sprightly Rob, whose sprightliness was very much diminished by the salutation, looked exceedingly dismayed, and said, with the water rising in his eyes:

'Oh! why can't you leave a poor cove alone, Misses Brown, when he's getting an honest livelihood and conducting himself respectable? What do you come and deprive a cove of his character for, by talking to him in the streets, when he's taking his master's horse to a honest stable - a horse you'd go and sell for cats' and dogs' meat if you had your way! Why, I thought,' said the Grinder, producing his concluding remark as if it were the climax of all his injuries, 'that you was dead long ago!'

'This is the way,' cried the old woman, appealing to her daughter, 'that he talks to me, who knew him weeks and months together, my deary, and have stood his friend many and many a time among the pigeon-fancying tramps and bird-catchers.'

'Let the birds be, will you, Misses Brown?' retorted Rob, in a tone of the acutest anguish. 'I think a cove had better have to do with lions than them little creeturs, for they're always flying back in your face when you least expect it. Well, how d'ye do and what do you want?' These polite inquiries the Grinder uttered, as it were under protest, and with great exasperation and vindictiveness.

'Hark how he speaks to an old friend, my deary!' said Mrs Brown, again appealing to her daughter. 'But there's some of his old friends not so patient as me. If I was to tell some that he knows, and has spotted and cheated with, where to find him - '

'Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?' interrupted the miserable Grinder, glancing quickly round, as though he expected to see his master's teeth shining at his elbow. 'What do you take a pleasure in ruining a cove for? At your time of life too! when you ought to be thinking of a variety of things!'

'What a gallant horse!' said the old woman, patting the animal's neck.

'Let him alone, will you, Misses Brown?' cried Rob, pushing away her hand. 'You're enough to drive a penitent cove mad!'

'Why, what hurt do I do him, child?' returned the old woman.

'Hurt?' said Rob. 'He's got a master that would find it out if he was touched with a straw.' And he blew upon the place where the old woman's hand had rested for a moment, and smoothed it gently with his finger, as if he seriously believed what he said.

The old woman looking back to mumble and mouth at her daughter, who followed, kept close to Rob's heels as he walked on with the bridle in his hand; and pursued the conversation.

'A good place, Rob, eh?' said she. 'You're in luck, my child.'

'Oh don't talk about luck, Misses Brown,' returned the wretched Grinder, facing round and stopping. 'If you'd never come, or if you'd go away, then indeed a cove might be considered tolerable lucky. Can't you go along, Misses Brown, and not foller me!' blubbered Rob, with sudden defiance. 'If the young woman's a friend of yours, why don't she take you away, instead of letting you make yourself so disgraceful!'

'What!' croaked the old woman, putting her face close to his, with a malevolent grin upon it that puckered up the loose skin down in her very throat. 'Do you deny your old chum! Have you lurked to my house fifty times, and slept sound in a corner when you had no other

bed but the paving-stones, and do you talk to me like this! Have I bought and sold with you, and helped you in my way of business, schoolboy, sneak, and what not, and do you tell me to go along? Could I raise a crowd of old company about you to-morrow morning, that would follow you to ruin like copies of your own shadow, and do you turn on me with your bold looks! I'll go. Come, Alice.'

'Stop, Misses Brown!' cried the distracted Grinder. 'What are you doing of? Don't put yourself in a passion! Don't let her go, if you please. I haven't meant any offence. I said 'how d'ye do,' at first, didn't I? But you wouldn't answer. How you do? Besides,' said Rob piteously, 'look here! How can a cove stand talking in the street with his master's prad a wanting to be took to be rubbed down, and his master up to every individgle thing that happens!'

The old woman made a show of being partially appeased, but shook her head, and mouthed and muttered still.

'Come along to the stables, and have a glass of something that's good for you, Misses Brown, can't you?' said Rob, 'instead of going on, like that, which is no good to you, nor anybody else. Come along with her, will you be so kind?' said Rob. 'I'm sure I'm delighted to see her, if it wasn't for the horse!'

With this apology, Rob turned away, a rueful picture of despair, and walked his charge down a bye street' The old woman, mouthing at her daughter, followed close upon him. The daughter followed.

Turning into a silent little square or court-yard that had a great church tower rising above it, and a packer's warehouse, and a bottle-maker's warehouse, for its places of business, Rob the Grinder delivered the white-legged horse to the hostler of a quaint stable at the corner; and inviting Mrs Brown and her daughter to seat themselves upon a stone bench at the gate of that establishment, soon reappeared from a neighbouring public-house with a pewter measure and a glass.

'Here's master - Mr Carker, child!' said the old woman, slowly, as her sentiment before drinking. 'Lord bless him!'

'Why, I didn't tell you who he was,' observed Rob, with staring eyes.

'We know him by sight,' said Mrs Brown, whose working mouth and nodding head stopped for the moment, in the fixedness of her attention. 'We saw him pass this morning, afore he got off his horse; when you were ready to take it.'

'Ay, ay,' returned Rob, appearing to wish that his readiness had carried him to any other place. - 'What's the matter with her? Won't she drink?'

This inquiry had reference to Alice, who, folded in her cloak, sat a little apart, profoundly inattentive to his offer of the replenished glass.

The old woman shook her head. 'Don't mind her,' she said; 'she's a strange creetur, if you know'd her, Rob. But Mr Carker

'Hush!' said Rob, glancing cautiously up at the packer's, and at the bottle-maker's, as if, from any one of the tiers of warehouses, Mr Carker might be looking down. 'Softly.'

'Why, he ain't here!' cried Mrs Brown.

'I don't know that,' muttered Rob, whose glance even wandered to the church tower, as if he might be there, with a supernatural power of hearing.

'Good master?' inquired Mrs Brown.

Rob nodded; and added, in a low voice, 'precious sharp.'

'Lives out of town, don't he, lovey?' said the old woman.

'When he's at home,' returned Rob; 'but we don't live at home just now.'

'Where then?' asked the old woman.

'Lodgings; up near Mr Dombey's,' returned Rob.

The younger woman fixed her eyes so searchingly upon him, and so suddenly, that Rob was quite confounded, and offered the glass again, but with no more effect upon her than before.

'Mr Dombey - you and I used to talk about him, sometimes, you know,' said Rob to Mrs Brown. 'You used to get me to talk about him.'

The old woman nodded.

'Well, Mr Dombey, he's had a fall from his horse,' said Rob, unwillingly; 'and my master has to be up there, more than usual, either with him, or Mrs Dombey, or some of 'em; and so we've come to town.'

'Are they good friends, lovey?'asked the old woman.

'Who?' retorted Rob.

'He and she?'

'What, Mr and Mrs Dombey?' said Rob. 'How should I know!'

'Not them - Master and Mrs Dombey, chick,' replied the old woman, coaxingly.

'I don't know,' said Rob, looking round him again. 'I suppose so. How curious you are, Misses Brown! Least said, soonest mended.'

'Why there's no harm in it!' exclaimed the old woman, with a laugh, and a clap of her hands. 'Sprightly Rob, has grown tame since he has been well off! There's no harm in It.

'No, there's no harm in it, I know,' returned Rob, with the same distrustful glance at the packer's and the bottle-maker's, and the church; 'but blabbing, if it's only about the number of buttons on my master's coat, won't do. I tell you it won't do with him. A cove had better drown himself. He says so. I shouldn't have so much as told you what his name was, if you hadn't known it. Talk about somebody else.'

As Rob took another cautious survey of the yard, the old woman made a secret motion to her daughter. It was momentary, but the daughter, with a slight look of intelligence, withdrew her eyes from the boy's face, and sat folded in her cloak as before.

'Rob, lovey!' said the old woman, beckoning him to the other end of the bench. 'You were always a pet and favourite of mine. Now, weren't you? Don't you know you were?'

'Yes, Misses Brown,' replied the Grinder, with a very bad grace.

'And you could leave me!' said the old woman, flinging her arms about his neck. 'You could go away, and grow almost out of knowledge, and never come to tell your poor old friend how fortunate you were, proud lad! Oho, Oho!'

'Oh here's a dreadful go for a cove that's got a master wide awake in the neighbourhood!' exclaimed the wretched Grinder. 'To be howled over like this here!'

'Won't you come and see me, Robby?' cried Mrs Brown. 'Oho, won't you ever come and see me?'

'Yes, I tell you! Yes, I will!' returned the Grinder.

'That's my own Rob! That's my lovey!' said Mrs Brown, drying the tears upon her shrivelled face, and giving him a tender squeeze. 'At the old place, Rob?'

'Yes,' replied the Grinder.

'Soon, Robby dear?' cried Mrs Brown; 'and often?'

'Yes. Yes. Yes,' replied Rob. 'I will indeed, upon my soul and body.'

'And then,' said Mrs Brown, with her arms uplifted towards the sky, and her head thrown back and shaking, 'if he's true to his word, I'll never come a-near him though I know where he is, and never breathe a syllable about him! Never!'

This ejaculation seemed a drop of comfort to the miserable Grinder, who shook Mrs Brown by the hand upon it, and implored her with tears in his eyes, to leave a cove and not destroy his prospects. Mrs Brown, with another fond embrace, assented; but in the act of following her daughter, turned back, with her finger stealthily raised, and asked in a hoarse whisper for some money.

'A shilling, dear!' she said, with her eager avaricious face, 'or sixpence! For old acquaintance sake. I'm so poor. And my handsome gal' - looking over her shoulder - 'she's my gal, Rob - half starves me.

But as the reluctant Grinder put it in her hand, her daughter, coming quietly back, caught the hand in hen, and twisted out the coin.

'What,' she said, 'mother! always money! money from the first, and to the last' Do you mind so little what I said but now? Here. Take it!'

The old woman uttered a moan as the money was restored, but without in any other way opposing its restoration, hobbled at her daughter's side out of the yard, and along the bye street upon which it opened. The astonished and dismayed Rob staring after them, saw that they stopped, and fell to earnest conversation very soon; and more than once observed a darkly threatening action of the younger woman's hand (obviously having reference to someone of whom they spoke), and a crooning feeble imitation of it on the part of Mrs Brown, that made him earnestly hope he might not be the subject of their discourse.

With the present consolation that they were gone, and with the prospective comfort that Mrs Brown could not live for ever, and was not likely to live long to trouble him, the Grinder, not otherwise regretting his misdeeds than as they were attended with such disagreeable incidental consequences, composed his ruffled features

to a more serene expression by thinking of the admirable manner in which he had disposed of Captain Cuttle (a reflection that seldom failed to put him in a flow of spirits), and went to the Dombey Counting House to receive his master's orders.

There his master, so subtle and vigilant of eye, that Rob quaked before him, more than half expecting to be taxed with Mrs Brown, gave him the usual morning's box of papers for Mr Dombey, and a note for Mrs Dombey: merely nodding his head as an enjoinder to be careful, and to use dispatch - a mysterious admonition, fraught in the Grinder's imagination with dismal warnings and threats; and more powerful with him than any words.

Alone again, in his own room, Mr Carker applied himself to work, and worked all day. He saw many visitors; overlooked a number of documents; went in and out, to and from, sundry places of mercantile resort; and indulged in no more abstraction until the day's business was done. But, when the usual clearance of papers from his table was made at last, he fell into his thoughtful mood once more.

He was standing in his accustomed place and attitude, with his eyes intently fixed upon the ground, when his brother entered to bring back some letters that had been taken out in the course of the day. He put them quietly on the table, and was going immediately, when Mr Carker the Manager, whose eyes had rested on him, on his entrance, as if they had all this time had him for the subject of their contemplation, instead of the office-floor, said:

'Well, John Carker, and what brings you here?'

His brother pointed to the letters, and was again withdrawing.

'I wonder,' said the Manager, 'that you can come and go, without inquiring how our master is'.

'We had word this morning in the Counting House, that Mr Dombey was doing well,' replied his brother.

'You are such a meek fellow,' said the Manager, with a smile, - 'but you have grown so, in the course of years - that if any harm came to him, you'd be miserable, I dare swear now.'

'I should be truly sorry, James,' returned the other.

'He would be sorry!' said the Manager, pointing at him, as if there were some other person present to whom he was appealing. 'He would be truly sorry! This brother of mine! This junior of the place, this slighted piece of lumber, pushed aside with his face to the wall, like a

rotten picture, and left so, for Heaven knows how many years he's all gratitude and respect, and devotion too, he would have me believe!'

'I would have you believe nothing, James,' returned the other. 'Be as just to me as you would to any other man below you. You ask a question, and I answer it.'

'And have you nothing, Spaniel,' said the Manager, with unusual irascibility, 'to complain of in him? No proud treatment to resent, no insolence, no foolery of state, no exaction of any sort! What the devil! are you man or mouse?'

'It would be strange if any two persons could be together for so many years, especially as superior and inferior, without each having something to complain of in the other - as he thought, at all events, replied John Carker. 'But apart from my history here - '

'His history here!' exclaimed the Manager. 'Why, there it is. The very fact that makes him an extreme case, puts him out of the whole chapter! Well?'

'Apart from that, which, as you hint, gives me a reason to be thankful that I alone (happily for all the rest) possess, surely there is no one in the House who would not say and feel at least as much. You do not think that anybody here would be indifferent to a mischance or misfortune happening to the head of the House, or anything than truly sorry for it?'

'You have good reason to be bound to him too!' said the Manager, contemptuously. 'Why, don't you believe that you are kept here, as a cheap example, and a famous instance of the clemency of Dombey and Son, redounding to the credit of the illustrious House?'

'No,' replied his brother, mildly, 'I have long believed that I am kept here for more kind and disinterested reasons.

'But you were going,' said the Manager, with the snarl of a tiger-cat, 'to recite some Christian precept, I observed.'

'Nay, James,' returned the other, 'though the tie of brotherhood between us has been long broken and thrown away - '

'Who broke it, good Sir?' said the Manager.

'I, by my misconduct. I do not charge it upon you.'

The Manager replied, with that mute action of his bristling mouth, 'Oh, you don't charge it upon me!' and bade him go on.

'I say, though there is not that tie between us, do not, I entreat, assail me with unnecessary taunts, or misinterpret what I say, or would say. I was only going to suggest to you that it would be a mistake to suppose that it is only you, who have been selected here, above all others, for advancement, confidence and distinction (selected, in the beginning, I know, for your great ability and trustfulness), and who communicate more freely with Mr Dombey than anyone, and stand, it may be said, on equal terms with him, and have been favoured and enriched by him - that it would be a mistake to suppose that it is only you who are tender of his welfare and reputation. There is no one in the House, from yourself down to the lowest, I sincerely believe, who does not participate in that feeling.'

'You lie!' said the Manager, red with sudden anger. 'You're a hypocrite, John Carker, and you lie.'

'James!' cried the other, flushing in his turn. 'What do you mean by these insulting words? Why do you so basely use them to me, unprovoked?'

'I tell you,' said the Manager, 'that your hypocrisy and meekness - that all the hypocrisy and meekness of this place - is not worth that to me,' snapping his thumb and finger, 'and that I see through it as if it were air! There is not a man employed here, standing between myself and the lowest in place (of whom you are very considerate, and with reason, for he is not far off), who wouldn't be glad at heart to see his master humbled: who does not hate him, secretly: who does not wish him evil rather than good: and who would not turn upon him, if he had the power and boldness. The nearer to his favour, the nearer to his insolence; the closer to him, the farther from him. That's the creed here!'

'I don't know,' said his brother, whose roused feelings had soon yielded to surprise, 'who may have abused your ear with such representations; or why you have chosen to try me, rather than another. But that you have been trying me, and tampering with me, I am now sure. You have a different manner and a different aspect from any that I ever saw m you. I will only say to you, once more, you are deceived.'

'I know I am,' said the Manager. 'I have told you so.'

'Not by me,' returned his brother. 'By your informant, if you have one. If not, by your own thoughts and suspicions.'

'I have no suspicions,' said the Manager. 'Mine are certainties. You pusillanimous, abject, cringing dogs! All making the same show, all

canting the same story, all whining the same professions, all harbouring the same transparent secret.'

His brother withdrew, without saying more, and shut the door as he concluded. Mr Carker the Manager drew a chair close before the fire, and fell to beating the coals softly with the poker.

'The faint-hearted, fawning knaves,' he muttered, with his two shining rows of teeth laid bare. 'There's not one among them, who wouldn't feign to be so shocked and outraged - ! Bah! There's not one among them, but if he had at once the power, and the wit and daring to use it, would scatter Dombey's pride and lay it low, as ruthlessly as I rake out these ashes.'

As he broke them up and strewed them in the grate, he looked on with a thoughtful smile at what he was doing. 'Without the same queen beckoner too!' he added presently; 'and there is pride there, not to be forgotten - witness our own acquaintance!' With that he fell into a deeper reverie, and sat pondering over the blackening grate, until he rose up like a man who had been absorbed in a book, and looking round him took his hat and gloves, went to where his horse was waiting, mounted, and rode away through the lighted streets, for it was evening.

He rode near Mr Dombey's house; and falling into a walk as he approached it, looked up at the windows The window where he had once seen Florence sitting with her dog attracted his attention first, though there was no light in it; but he smiled as he carried his eyes up the tall front of the house, and seemed to leave that object superciliously behind.

'Time was,' he said, 'when it was well to watch even your rising little star, and know in what quarter there were clouds, to shadow you if needful. But a planet has arisen, and you are lost in its light.'

He turned the white-legged horse round the street corner, and sought one shining window from among those at the back of the house. Associated with it was a certain stately presence, a gloved hand, the remembrance how the feathers of a beautiful bird's wing had been showered down upon the floor, and how the light white down upon a robe had stirred and rustled, as in the rising of a distant storm. These were the things he carried with him as he turned away again, and rode through the darkening and deserted Parks at a quick rate.

In fatal truth, these were associated with a woman, a proud woman, who hated him, but who by slow and sure degrees had been led on by his craft, and her pride and resentment, to endure his company, and little by little to receive him as one who had the privilege to talk to her

of her own defiant disregard of her own husband, and her abandonment of high consideration for herself. They were associated with a woman who hated him deeply, and who knew him, and who mistrusted him because she knew him, and because he knew her; but who fed her fierce resentment by suffering him to draw nearer and yet nearer to her every day, in spite of the hate she cherished for him. In spite of it! For that very reason; since in its depths, too far down for her threatening eye to pierce, though she could see into them dimly, lay the dark retaliation, whose faintest shadow seen once and shuddered at, and never seen again, would have been sufficient stain upon her soul.

Did the phantom of such a woman flit about him on his ride; true to the reality, and obvious to him?

Yes. He saw her in his mind, exactly as she was. She bore him company with her pride, resentment, hatred, all as plain to him as her beauty; with nothing plainer to him than her hatred of him. He saw her sometimes haughty and repellent at his side, and some times down among his horse's feet, fallen and in the dust. But he always saw her as she was, without disguise, and watched her on the dangerous way that she was going.

And when his ride was over, and he was newly dressed, and came into the light of her bright room with his bent head, soft voice, and soothing smile, he saw her yet as plainly. He even suspected the mystery of the gloved hand, and held it all the longer in his own for that suspicion. Upon the dangerous way that she was going, he was, still; and not a footprint did she mark upon it, but he set his own there, straight'