

Chapter XLIX - The Midshipman Makes A Discovery

It was long before Florence awoke. The day was in its prime, the day was in its wane, and still, uneasy in mind and body, she slept on; unconscious of her strange bed, of the noise and turmoil in the street, and of the light that shone outside the shaded window. Perfect unconsciousness of what had happened in the home that existed no more, even the deep slumber of exhaustion could not produce. Some undefined and mournful recollection of it, dozing uneasily but never sleeping, pervaded all her rest. A dull sorrow, like a half-lulled sense of pain, was always present to her; and her pale cheek was oftener wet with tears than the honest Captain, softly putting in his head from time to time at the half-closed door, could have desired to see it. The sun was getting low in the west, and, glancing out of a red mist, pierced with its rays opposite loopholes and pieces of fretwork in the spires of city churches, as if with golden arrows that struck through and through them - and far away athwart the river and its flat banks, it was gleaming like a path of fire - and out at sea it was irradiating sails of ships - and, looked towards, from quiet churchyards, upon hill-tops in the country, it was steeping distant prospects in a flush and glow that seemed to mingle earth and sky together in one glorious suffusion - when Florence, opening her heavy eyes, lay at first, looking without interest or recognition at the unfamiliar walls around her, and listening in the same regardless manner to the noises in the street. But presently she started up upon her couch, gazed round with a surprised and vacant look, and recollected all.

'My pretty,' said the Captain, knocking at the door, 'what cheer?'

'Dear friend,' cried Florence, hurrying to him, 'is it you?'

The Captain felt so much pride in the name, and was so pleased by the gleam of pleasure in her face, when she saw him, that he kissed his hook, by way of reply, in speechless gratification.

'What cheer, bright di'mond?' said the Captain.

'I have surely slept very long,' returned Florence. 'When did I come here? Yesterday?'

'This here blessed day, my lady lass,' replied the Captain.

'Has there been no night? Is it still day?' asked Florence.

'Getting on for evening now, my pretty,' said the Captain, drawing back the curtain of the window. 'See!'

Florence, with her hand upon the Captain's arm, so sorrowful and timid, and the Captain with his rough face and burly figure, so quietly protective of her, stood in the rosy light of the bright evening sky, without saying a word. However strange the form of speech into which he might have fashioned the feeling, if he had had to give it utterance, the Captain felt, as sensibly as the most eloquent of men could have done, that there was something in the tranquil time and in its softened beauty that would make the wounded heart of Florence overflow; and that it was better that such tears should have their way. So not a word spake Captain Cuttle. But when he felt his arm clasped closer, and when he felt the lonely head come nearer to it, and lay itself against his homely coarse blue sleeve, he pressed it gently with his rugged hand, and understood it, and was understood.

'Better now, my pretty!' said the Captain. 'Cheerily, cheerily, I'll go down below, and get some dinner ready. Will you come down of your own self, arterwards, pretty, or shall Ed'ard Cuttle come and fetch you?'

As Florence assured him that she was quite able to walk downstairs, the Captain, though evidently doubtful of his own hospitality in permitting it, left her to do so, and immediately set about roasting a fowl at the fire in the little parlour. To achieve his cookery with the greater skill, he pulled off his coat, tucked up his wristbands, and put on his glazed hat, without which assistant he never applied himself to any nice or difficult undertaking.

After cooling her aching head and burning face in the fresh water which the Captain's care had provided for her while she slept, Florence went to the little mirror to bind up her disordered hair. Then she knew - in a moment, for she shunned it instantly, that on her breast there was the darkening mark of an angry hand.

Her tears burst forth afresh at the sight; she was ashamed and afraid of it; but it moved her to no anger against him. Homeless and fatherless, she forgave him everything; hardly thought that she had need to forgive him, or that she did; but she fled from the idea of him as she had fled from the reality, and he was utterly gone and lost. There was no such Being in the world.

What to do, or where to live, Florence - poor, inexperienced girl! - could not yet consider. She had indistinct dreams of finding, a long way off, some little sisters to instruct, who would be gentle with her, and to whom, under some feigned name, she might attach herself, and who would grow up in their happy home, and marry, and be good to their old governess, and perhaps entrust her, in time, with the education of their own daughters. And she thought how strange and sorrowful it would be, thus to become a grey-haired woman, carrying

her secret to the grave, when Florence Dombey was forgotten. But it was all dim and clouded to her now. She only knew that she had no Father upon earth, and she said so, many times, with her suppliant head hidden from all, but her Father who was in Heaven.

Her little stock of money amounted to but a few guineas. With a part of this, it would be necessary to buy some clothes, for she had none but those she wore. She was too desolate to think how soon her money would be gone - too much a child in worldly matters to be greatly troubled on that score yet, even if her other trouble had been less. She tried to calm her thoughts and stay her tears; to quiet the hurry in her throbbing head, and bring herself to believe that what had happened were but the events of a few hours ago, instead of weeks or months, as they appeared; and went down to her kind protector.

The Captain had spread the cloth with great care, and was making some egg-sauce in a little saucepan: basting the fowl from time to time during the process with a strong interest, as it turned and browned on a string before the fire. Having propped Florence up with cushions on the sofa, which was already wheeled into a warm corner for her greater comfort, the Captain pursued his cooking with extraordinary skill, making hot gravy in a second little saucepan, boiling a handful of potatoes in a third, never forgetting the egg-sauce in the first, and making an impartial round of basting and stirring with the most useful of spoons every minute. Besides these cares, the Captain had to keep his eye on a diminutive frying-pan, in which some sausages were hissing and bubbling in a most musical manner; and there was never such a radiant cook as the Captain looked, in the height and heat of these functions: it being impossible to say whether his face or his glazed hat shone the brighter.

The dinner being at length quite ready, Captain Cuttle dished and served it up, with no less dexterity than he had cooked it. He then dressed for dinner, by taking off his glazed hat and putting on his coat. That done, he wheeled the table close against Florence on the sofa, said grace, unscrewed his hook, screwed his fork into its place, and did the honours of the table

'My lady lass,' said the Captain, 'cheer up, and try to eat a deal. Stand by, my deary! Liver wing it is. Sarse it is. Sassage it is. And potato!' all which the Captain ranged symmetrically on a plate, and pouring hot gravy on the whole with the useful spoon, set before his cherished guest.

'The whole row o' dead lights is up, for'ard, lady lass,' observed the Captain, encouragingly, 'and everythink is made snug. Try and pick a bit, my pretty. If Wal'r was here - '

'Ah! If I had him for my brother now!' cried Florence.

'Don't! don't take on, my pretty!' said the Captain, 'awast, to obleege me! He was your nat'ral born friend like, warn't he, Pet?'

Florence had no words to answer with. She only said, 'Oh, dear, dear Paul! oh, Walter!'

'The wery planks she walked on,' murmured the Captain, looking at her drooping face, 'was as high esteemed by Wal'r, as the water brooks is by the hart which never rejices! I see him now, the wery day as he was rated on them Dombey books, a speaking of her with his face a glistening with doo - leastways with his modest sentiments - like a new blowed rose, at dinner. Well, well! If our poor Wal'r was here, my lady lass - or if he could be - for he's drowned, ain't he?'

Florence shook her head.

'Yes, yes; drowned,' said the Captain, soothingly; 'as I was saying, if he could be here he'd beg and pray of you, my precious, to pick a leetle bit, with a look-out for your own sweet health. Whereby, hold your own, my lady lass, as if it was for Wal'r's sake, and lay your pretty head to the wind.'

Florence essayed to eat a morsel, for the Captain's pleasure. The Captain, meanwhile, who seemed to have quite forgotten his own dinner, laid down his knife and fork, and drew his chair to the sofa.

'Wal'r was a trim lad, warn't he, precious?' said the Captain, after sitting for some time silently rubbing his chin, with his eyes fixed upon her, 'and a brave lad, and a good lad?' Florence tearfully assented.

'And he's drowned, Beauty, ain't he?' said the Captain, in a soothing voice.

Florence could not but assent again.

'He was older than you, my lady lass,' pursued the Captain, 'but you was like two children together, at first; wam't you?'

Florence answered 'Yes.'

'And Wal'r's drowned,' said the Captain. 'Ain't he?'

The repetition of this inquiry was a curious source of consolation, but it seemed to be one to Captain Cuttle, for he came back to it again and again. Florence, fain to push from her her untasted dinner, and to lie

back on her sofa, gave him her hand, feeling that she had disappointed him, though truly wishing to have pleased him after all his trouble, but he held it in his own (which shook as he held it), and appearing to have quite forgotten all about the dinner and her want of appetite, went on growling at intervals, in a ruminating tone of sympathy, 'Poor Wal'r. Ay, ay! Drownded. Ain't he?' And always waited for her answer, in which the great point of these singular reflections appeared to consist.

The fowl and sausages were cold, and the gravy and the egg-sauce stagnant, before the Captain remembered that they were on the board, and fell to with the assistance of Diogenes, whose united efforts quickly dispatched the banquet. The Captain's delight and wonder at the quiet housewifery of Florence in assisting to clear the table, arrange the parlour, and sweep up the hearth - only to be equalled by the fervency of his protest when she began to assist him - were gradually raised to that degree, that at last he could not choose but do nothing himself, and stand looking at her as if she were some Fairy, daintily performing these offices for him; the red rim on his forehead glowing again, in his unspeakable admiration.

But when Florence, taking down his pipe from the mantel-shelf gave it into his hand, and entreated him to smoke it, the good Captain was so bewildered by her attention that he held it as if he had never held a pipe, in all his life. Likewise, when Florence, looking into the little cupboard, took out the case-bottle and mixed a perfect glass of grog for him, unasked, and set it at his elbow, his ruddy nose turned pale, he felt himself so graced and honoured. When he had filled his pipe in an absolute reverie of satisfaction, Florence lighted it for him - the Captain having no power to object, or to prevent her - and resuming her place on the old sofa, looked at him with a smile so loving and so grateful, a smile that showed him so plainly how her forlorn heart turned to him, as her face did, through grief, that the smoke of the pipe got into the Captain's throat and made him cough, and got into the Captain's eyes, and made them blink and water.

The manner in which the Captain tried to make believe that the cause of these effects lay hidden in the pipe itself, and the way in which he looked into the bowl for it, and not finding it there, pretended to blow it out of the stem, was wonderfully pleasant. The pipe soon getting into better condition, he fell into that state of repose becoming a good smoker; but sat with his eyes fixed on Florence, and, with a beaming placidity not to be described, and stopping every now and then to discharge a little cloud from his lips, slowly puffed it forth, as if it were a scroll coming out of his mouth, bearing the legend 'Poor Wal'r, ay, ay. Drownded, ain't he?' after which he would resume his smoking with infinite gentleness.

Unlike as they were externally - and there could scarcely be a more decided contrast than between Florence in her delicate youth and beauty, and Captain Cuttle with his knobby face, his great broad weather-beaten person, and his gruff voice - in simple innocence of the world's ways and the world's perplexities and dangers, they were nearly on a level. No child could have surpassed Captain Cuttle in inexperience of everything but wind and weather; in simplicity, credulity, and generous trustfulness. Faith, hope, and charity, shared his whole nature among them. An odd sort of romance, perfectly unimaginative, yet perfectly unreal, and subject to no considerations of worldly prudence or practicability, was the only partner they had in his character. As the Captain sat, and smoked, and looked at Florence, God knows what impossible pictures, in which she was the principal figure, presented themselves to his mind. Equally vague and uncertain, though not so sanguine, were her own thoughts of the life before her; and even as her tears made prismatic colours in the light she gazed at, so, through her new and heavy grief, she already saw a rainbow faintly shining in the far-off sky. A wandering princess and a good monster in a storybook might have sat by the fireside, and talked as Captain Cuttle and poor Florence talked - and not have looked very much unlike them.

The Captain was not troubled with the faintest idea of any difficulty in retaining Florence, or of any responsibility thereby incurred. Having put up the shutters and locked the door, he was quite satisfied on this head. If she had been a Ward in Chancery, it would have made no difference at all to Captain Cuttle. He was the last man in the world to be troubled by any such considerations.

So the Captain smoked his pipe very comfortably, and Florence and he meditated after their own manner. When the pipe was out, they had some tea; and then Florence entreated him to take her to some neighbouring shop, where she could buy the few necessaries she immediately wanted. It being quite dark, the Captain consented: peeping carefully out first, as he had been wont to do in his time of hiding from Mrs MacStinger; and arming himself with his large stick, in case of an appeal to arms being rendered necessary by any unforeseen circumstance.

The pride Captain Cuttle had, in giving his arm to Florence, and escorting her some two or three hundred yards, keeping a bright look-out all the time, and attracting the attention of everyone who passed them, by his great vigilance and numerous precautions, was extreme. Arrived at the shop, the Captain felt it a point of delicacy to retire during the making of the purchases, as they were to consist of wearing apparel; but he previously deposited his tin canister on the counter, and informing the young lady of the establishment that it contained fourteen pound two, requested her, in case that amount of

property should not be sufficient to defray the expenses of his niece's little outfit - at the word 'niece,' he bestowed a most significant look on Florence, accompanied with pantomime, expressive of sagacity and mystery - to have the goodness to 'sing out,' and he would make up the difference from his pocket. Casually consulting his big watch, as a deep means of dazzling the establishment, and impressing it with a sense of property, the Captain then kissed his hook to his niece, and retired outside the window, where it was a choice sight to see his great face looking in from time to time, among the silks and ribbons, with an obvious misgiving that Florence had been spirited away by a back door.

'Dear Captain Cuttle,' said Florence, when she came out with a parcel, the size of which greatly disappointed the Captain, who had expected to see a porter following with a bale of goods, 'I don't want this money, indeed. I have not spent any of it. I have money of my own.'

'My lady lass,' returned the baffled Captain, looking straight down the street before them, 'take care on it for me, will you be so good, till such time as I ask ye for it?'

'May I put it back in its usual place,' said Florence, 'and keep it there?'

The Captain was not at all gratified by this proposal, but he answered, 'Ay, ay, put it anywheres, my lady lass, so long as you know where to find it again. It ain't o' no use to me,' said the Captain. 'I wonder I haven't chucked it away afore now.'

The Captain was quite disheartened for the moment, but he revived at the first touch of Florence's arm, and they returned with the same precautions as they had come; the Captain opening the door of the little Midshipman's berth, and diving in, with a suddenness which his great practice only could have taught him. During Florence's slumber in the morning, he had engaged the daughter of an elderly lady who usually sat under a blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market, selling poultry, to come and put her room in order, and render her any little services she required; and this damsel now appearing, Florence found everything about her as convenient and orderly, if not as handsome, as in the terrible dream she had once called Home.

When they were alone again, the Captain insisted on her eating a slice of dry toast' and drinking a glass of spiced negus (which he made to perfection); and, encouraging her with every kind word and inconsequential quotation he could possibly think of, led her upstairs to her bedroom. But he too had something on his mind, and was not easy in his manner.

'Good-night, dear heart,' said Captain Cuttle to her at her chamber-door.

Florence raised her lips to his face, and kissed him.

At any other time the Captain would have been overbalanced by such a token of her affection and gratitude; but now, although he was very sensible of it, he looked in her face with even more uneasiness than he had testified before, and seemed unwilling to leave her.

'Poor Wal'r!' said the Captain.

'Poor, poor Walter!' sighed Florence.

'Drownded, ain't he?' said the Captain.

Florence shook her head, and sighed.

'Good-night, my lady lass!' said Captain Cuttle, putting out his hand.

'God bless you, dear, kind friend!'

But the Captain lingered still.

'Is anything the matter, dear Captain Cuttle?' said Florence, easily alarmed in her then state of mind. 'Have you anything to tell me?'

'To tell you, lady lass!' replied the Captain, meeting her eyes in confusion. 'No, no; what should I have to tell you, pretty! You don't expect as I've got anything good to tell you, sure?'

'No!' said Florence, shaking her head.

The Captain looked at her wistfully, and repeated 'No,' - ' still lingering, and still showing embarrassment.

'Poor Wal'r!' said the Captain. 'My Wal'r, as I used to call you! Old Sol Gills's nevy! Welcome to all as knowed you, as the flowers in May! Where are you got to, brave boy? Drownded, ain't he?'

Concluding his apostrophe with this abrupt appeal to Florence, the Captain bade her good-night, and descended the stairs, while Florence remained at the top, holding the candle out to light him down. He was lost in the obscurity, and, judging from the sound of his receding footsteps, was in the act of turning into the little parlour, when his head and shoulders unexpectedly emerged again, as from the deep, apparently for no other purpose than to repeat, 'Drownded, ain't he,

pretty?' For when he had said that in a tone of tender condolence, he disappeared.

Florence was very sorry that she should unwittingly, though naturally, have awakened these associations in the mind of her protector, by taking refuge there; and sitting down before the little table where the Captain had arranged the telescope and song-book, and those other rarities, thought of Walter, and of all that was connected with him in the past, until she could have almost wished to lie down on her bed and fade away. But in her lonely yearning to the dead whom she had loved, no thought of home - no possibility of going back - no presentation of it as yet existing, or as sheltering her father - once entered her thoughts. She had seen the murder done. In the last lingering natural aspect in which she had cherished him through so much, he had been torn out of her heart, defaced, and slain. The thought of it was so appalling to her, that she covered her eyes, and shrank trembling from the least remembrance of the deed, or of the cruel hand that did it. If her fond heart could have held his image after that, it must have broken; but it could not; and the void was filled with a wild dread that fled from all confronting with its shattered fragments - with such a dread as could have risen out of nothing but the depths of such a love, so wronged.

She dared not look into the glass; for the sight of the darkening mark upon her bosom made her afraid of herself, as if she bore about her something wicked. She covered it up, with a hasty, faltering hand, and in the dark; and laid her weary head down, weeping.

The Captain did not go to bed for a long time. He walked to and fro in the shop and in the little parlour, for a full hour, and, appearing to have composed himself by that exercise, sat down with a grave and thoughtful face, and read out of a Prayer-book the forms of prayer appointed to be used at sea. These were not easily disposed of; the good Captain being a mighty slow, gruff reader, and frequently stopping at a hard word to give himself such encouragement as Now, my lad! With a will!' or, 'Steady, Ed'ard Cuttle, steady!' which had a great effect in helping him out of any difficulty. Moreover, his spectacles greatly interfered with his powers of vision. But notwithstanding these drawbacks, the Captain, being heartily in earnest, read the service to the very last line, and with genuine feeling too; and approving of it very much when he had done, turned in, under the counter (but not before he had been upstairs, and listened at Florence's door), with a serene breast, and a most benevolent visage.

The Captain turned out several times in the course of the night, to assure himself that his charge was resting quietly; and once, at

daybreak, found that she was awake: for she called to know if it were he, on hearing footsteps near her door.

'Yes' my lady lass,' replied the Captain, in a growling whisper. 'Are you all right, di'mond?'

Florence thanked him, and said 'Yes.'

The Captain could not lose so favourable an opportunity of applying his mouth to the keyhole, and calling through it, like a hoarse breeze, 'Poor Wal'r! Drownded, ain't he?' after which he withdrew, and turning in again, slept till seven o'clock.

Nor was he free from his uneasy and embarrassed manner all that day; though Florence, being busy with her needle in the little parlour, was more calm and tranquil than she had been on the day preceding. Almost always when she raised her eyes from her work, she observed the captain looking at her, and thoughtfully stroking his chin; and he so often hitched his arm-chair close to her, as if he were going to say something very confidential, and hitched it away again, as not being able to make up his mind how to begin, that in the course of the day he cruised completely round the parlour in that frail bark, and more than once went ashore against the wainscot or the closet door, in a very distressed condition.

It was not until the twilight that Captain Cuttle, fairly dropping anchor, at last, by the side of Florence, began to talk at all connectedly. But when the light of the fire was shining on the walls and ceiling of the little room, and on the tea-board and the cups and saucers that were ranged upon the table, and on her calm face turned towards the flame, and reflecting it in the tears that filled her eyes, the Captain broke a long silence thus:

'You never was at sea, my own?'

'No,' replied Florence.

'Ay,' said the Captain, reverentially; 'it's a almighty element. There's wonders in the deep, my pretty. Think on it when the winds is roaring and the waves is rowling. Think on it when the stormy nights is so pitch dark,' said the Captain, solemnly holding up his hook, 'as you can't see your hand afore you, excepting when the wiwid lightning reveals the same; and when you drive, drive, drive through the storm and dark, as if you was a driving, head on, to the world without end, evermore, amen, and when found making a note of. Them's the times, my beauty, when a man may say to his messmate (previously a overhauling of the wollume), 'A stiff nor'wester's blowing, Bill; hark, don't you hear it roar now! Lord help 'em, how I pitys all unhappy

folks ashore now!" Which quotation, as particularly applicable to the terrors of the ocean, the Captain delivered in a most impressive manner, concluding with a sonorous 'Stand by!'

'Were you ever in a dreadful storm?' asked Florence.

'Why ay, my lady lass, I've seen my share of bad weather,' said the Captain, tremulously wiping his head, 'and I've had my share of knocking about; but - but it ain't of myself as I was a meaning to speak. Our dear boy,' drawing closer to her, 'Wal'r, darling, as was drowned.'

The Captain spoke in such a trembling voice, and looked at Florence with a face so pale and agitated, that she clung to his hand in affright.

'Your face is changed,' cried Florence. 'You are altered in a moment. What is it? Dear Captain Cuttle, it turns me cold to see you!'

'What! Lady lass,' returned the Captain, supporting her with his hand, 'don't be took aback. No, no! All's well, all's well, my dear. As I was a saying - Wal'r - he's - he's drowned. Ain't he?'

Florence looked at him intently; her colour came and went; and she laid her hand upon her breast.

'There's perils and dangers on the deep, my beauty,' said the Captain; 'and over many a brave ship, and many and many a bould heart, the secret waters has closed up, and never told no tales. But there's escapes upon the deep, too, and sometimes one man out of a score, - ah! maybe out of a hundred, pretty, - has been saved by the mercy of God, and come home after being given over for dead, and told of all hands lost. I - I know a story, Heart's Delight,' stammered the Captain, 'o' this natur, as was told to me once; and being on this here tack, and you and me sitting alone by the fire, maybe you'd like to hear me tell it. Would you, deary?'

Florence, trembling with an agitation which she could not control or understand, involuntarily followed his glance, which went behind her into the shop, where a lamp was burning. The instant that she turned her head, the Captain sprung out of his chair, and interposed his hand.

'There's nothing there, my beauty,' said the Captain. 'Don't look there.'

'Why not?' asked Florence.

The Captain murmured something about its being dull that way, and about the fire being cheerful. He drew the door ajar, which had been

standing open until now, and resumed his seat. Florence followed him with her eyes, and looked intently in his face.

'The story was about a ship, my lady lass,' began the Captain, 'as sailed out of the Port of London, with a fair wind and in fair weather, bound for - don't be took aback, my lady lass, she was only out'ard bound, pretty, only out'ard bound!'

The expression on Florence's face alarmed the Captain, who was himself very hot and flurried, and showed scarcely less agitation than she did.

'Shall I go on, Beauty?' said the Captain.

'Yes, yes, pray!' cried Florence.

The Captain made a gulp as if to get down something that was sticking in his throat, and nervously proceeded:

'That there unfort'nate ship met with such foul weather, out at sea, as don't blow once in twenty year, my darling. There was hurricanes ashore as tore up forests and blowed down towns, and there was gales at sea in them latitudes, as not the stoutest wessel ever launched could live in. Day arter day that there unfort'nate ship behaved noble, I'm told, and did her duty brave, my pretty, but at one blow a'most her bulwarks was stove in, her masts and rudder carved away, her best man swept overboard, and she left to the mercy of the storm as had no mercy but blowed harder and harder yet, while the waves dashed over her, and beat her in, and every time they come a thundering at her, broke her like a shell. Every black spot in every mountain of water that rolled away was a bit o' the ship's life or a living man, and so she went to pieces, Beauty, and no grass will never grow upon the graves of them as manned that ship.'

'They were not all lost!' cried Florence. 'Some were saved! - Was one?'

'Aboard o' that there unfort'nate wessel,' said the Captain, rising from his chair, and clenching his hand with prodigious energy and exultation, 'was a lad, a gallant lad - as I've heerd tell - that had loved, when he was a boy, to read and talk about brave actions in shipwrecks - I've heerd him! I've heerd him! - and he remembered of 'em in his hour of need; for when the stoutest and oldest hands was hove down, he was firm and cheery. It warn't the want of objects to like and love ashore that gave him courage, it was his nat'ral mind. I've seen it in his face, when he was no more than a child - ay, many a time! - and when I thought it nothing but his good looks, bless him!'

'And was he saved!' cried Florence. 'Was he saved!'

'That brave lad,' said the Captain, - 'look at me, pretty! Don't look round - ' Florence had hardly power to repeat, 'Why not?'

'Because there's nothing there, my deary,' said the Captain. 'Don't be took aback, pretty creetur! Don't, for the sake of Wal'r, as was dear to all on us! That there lad,' said the Captain, 'arter working with the best, and standing by the faint-hearted, and never making no complaint nor sign of fear, and keeping up a spirit in all hands that made 'em honour him as if he'd been a admiral - that lad, along with the second-mate and one seaman, was left, of all the beatin' hearts that went aboard that ship, the only living creeturs - lashed to a fragment of the wreck, and driftin' on the stormy sea.

Were they saved?' cried Florence.

'Days and nights they drifted on them endless waters,' said the Captain, 'until at last - No! Don't look that way, pretty! - a sail bore down upon 'em, and they was, by the Lord's mercy, took aboard: two living and one dead.'

'Which of them was dead?' cried Florence.

'Not the lad I speak on,' said the Captain.

'Thank God! oh thank God!'

'Amen!' returned the Captain hurriedly. 'Don't be took aback! A minute more, my lady lass! with a good heart! - aboard that ship, they went a long voyage, right away across the chart (for there warn't no touching nowhere), and on that voyage the seaman as was picked up with him died. But he was spared, and - '

The Captain, without knowing what he did, had cut a slice of bread from the loaf, and put it on his hook (which was his usual toasting-fork), on which he now held it to the fire; looking behind Florence with great emotion in his face, and suffering the bread to blaze and burn like fuel.

'Was spared,' repeated Florence, 'and-?'

'And come home in that ship,' said the Captain, still looking in the same direction, 'and - don't be frightened, pretty - and landed; and one morning come cautiously to his own door to take a obserwation, knowing that his friends would think him drownded, when he sheered off at the unexpected - '

'At the unexpected barking of a dog?' cried Florence, quickly.

'Yes,' roared the Captain. 'Steady, darling! courage! Don't look round yet. See there! upon the wall!'

There was the shadow of a man upon the wall close to her. She started up, looked round, and with a piercing cry, saw Walter Gay behind her!

She had no thought of him but as a brother, a brother rescued from the grave; a shipwrecked brother saved and at her side; and rushed into his arms. In all the world, he seemed to be her hope, her comfort, refuge, natural protector. 'Take care of Walter, I was fond of Walter!' The dear remembrance of the plaintive voice that said so, rushed upon her soul, like music in the night. 'Oh welcome home, dear Walter! Welcome to this stricken breast!' She felt the words, although she could not utter them, and held him in her pure embrace.

Captain Cuttle, in a fit of delirium, attempted to wipe his head with the blackened toast upon his hook: and finding it an uncongenial substance for the purpose, put it into the crown of his glazed hat, put the glazed hat on with some difficulty, essayed to sing a verse of Lovely Peg, broke down at the first word, and retired into the shop, whence he presently came back express, with a face all flushed and besmeared, and the starch completely taken out of his shirt-collar, to say these words:

'Wal'r, my lad, here is a little bit of property as I should wish to make over, jintly!'

The Captain hastily produced the big watch, the teaspoons, the sugar-tongs, and the canister, and laying them on the table, swept them with his great hand into Walter's hat; but in handing that singular strong box to Walter, he was so overcome again, that he was fain to make another retreat into the shop, and absent himself for a longer space of time than on his first retirement.

But Walter sought him out, and brought him back; and then the Captain's great apprehension was, that Florence would suffer from this new shock. He felt it so earnestly, that he turned quite rational, and positively interdicted any further allusion to Walter's adventures for some days to come. Captain Cuttle then became sufficiently composed to relieve himself of the toast in his hat, and to take his place at the tea-board; but finding Walter's grasp upon his shoulder, on one side, and Florence whispering her tearful congratulations on the other, the Captain suddenly bolted again, and was missing for a good ten minutes.

But never in all his life had the Captain's face so shone and glistened, as when, at last, he sat stationary at the tea-board, looking from

Florence to Walter, and from Walter to Florence. Nor was this effect produced or at all heightened by the immense quantity of polishing he had administered to his face with his coat-sleeve during the last half-hour. It was solely the effect of his internal emotions. There was a glory and delight within the Captain that spread itself over his whole visage, and made a perfect illumination there.

The pride with which the Captain looked upon the bronzed cheek and the courageous eyes of his recovered boy; with which he saw the generous fervour of his youth, and all its frank and hopeful qualities, shining once more, in the fresh, wholesome manner, and the ardent face, would have kindled something of this light in his countenance. The admiration and sympathy with which he turned his eyes on Florence, whose beauty, grace, and innocence could have won no truer or more zealous champion than himself, would have had an equal influence upon him. But the fulness of the glow he shed around him could only have been engendered in his contemplation of the two together, and in all the fancies springing out of that association, that came sparkling and beaming into his head, and danced about it.

How they talked of poor old Uncle Sol, and dwelt on every little circumstance relating to his disappearance; how their joy was moderated by the old man's absence and by the misfortunes of Florence; how they released Diogenes, whom the Captain had decoyed upstairs some time before, lest he should bark again; the Captain, though he was in one continual flutter, and made many more short plunges into the shop, fully comprehended. But he no more dreamed that Walter looked on Florence, as it were, from a new and far-off place; that while his eyes often sought the lovely face, they seldom met its open glance of sisterly affection, but withdrew themselves when hers were raised towards him; than he believed that it was Walter's ghost who sat beside him. He saw them together in their youth and beauty, and he knew the story of their younger days, and he had no inch of room beneath his great blue waistcoat for anything save admiration of such a pair, and gratitude for their being reunited.

They sat thus, until it grew late. The Captain would have been content to sit so for a week. But Walter rose, to take leave for the night.

'Going, Walter!' said Florence. 'Where?'

'He slings his hammock for the present, lady lass,' said Captain Cuttle, 'round at Brogley's. Within hail, Heart's Delight.'

'I am the cause of your going away, Walter,' said Florence. 'There is a houseless sister in your place.'

'Dear Miss Dombey,' replied Walter, hesitating - 'if it is not too bold to call you so!

Walter!' she exclaimed, surprised.

'If anything could make me happier in being allowed to see and speak to you, would it not be the discovery that I had any means on earth of doing you a moment's service! Where would I not go, what would I not do, for your sake?'

She smiled, and called him brother.

'You are so changed,' said Walter -

'I changed!' she interrupted.

'To me,' said Walter, softly, as if he were thinking aloud, 'changed to me. I left you such a child, and find you - oh! something so different - '

'But your sister, Walter. You have not forgotten what we promised to each other, when we parted?'

'Forgotten!' But he said no more.

'And if you had - if suffering and danger had driven it from your thoughts - which it has not - you would remember it now, Walter, when you find me poor and abandoned, with no home but this, and no friends but the two who hear me speak!'

'I would! Heaven knows I would!' said Walter.

'Oh, Walter,' exclaimed Florence, through her sobs and tears. 'Dear brother! Show me some way through the world - some humble path that I may take alone, and labour in, and sometimes think of you as one who will protect and care for me as for a sister! Oh, help me, Walter, for I need help so much!'

'Miss Dombey! Florence! I would die to help you. But your friends are proud and rich. Your father - '

'No, no! Walter!' She shrieked, and put her hands up to her head, in an attitude of terror that transfixed him where he stood. 'Don't say that word!'

He never, from that hour, forgot the voice and look with which she stopped him at the name. He felt that if he were to live a hundred years, he never could forget it.

Somewhere - anywhere - but never home! All past, all gone, all lost, and broken up! The whole history of her untold slight and suffering was in the cry and look; and he felt he never could forget it, and he never did.

She laid her gentle face upon the Captain's shoulder, and related how and why she had fled. If every sorrowing tear she shed in doing so, had been a curse upon the head of him she never named or blamed, it would have been better for him, Walter thought, with awe, than to be renounced out of such a strength and might of love.

'There, precious!' said the Captain, when she ceased; and deep attention the Captain had paid to her while she spoke; listening, with his glazed hat all awry and his mouth wide open. 'Awast, awast, my eyes! Wal'r, dear lad, sheer off for to-night, and leave the pretty one to me!'

Walter took her hand in both of his, and put it to his lips, and kissed it. He knew now that she was, indeed, a homeless wandering fugitive; but, richer to him so, than in all the wealth and pride of her right station, she seemed farther off than even on the height that had made him giddy in his boyish dreams.

Captain Cuttle, perplexed by no such meditations, guarded Florence to her room, and watched at intervals upon the charmed ground outside her door - for such it truly was to him - until he felt sufficiently easy in his mind about her, to turn in under the counter. On abandoning his watch for that purpose, he could not help calling once, rapturously, through the keyhole, 'Drownded. Ain't he, pretty?' - or, when he got downstairs, making another trial at that verse of Lovely Peg. But it stuck in his throat somehow, and he could make nothing of it; so he went to bed, and dreamed that old Sol Gills was married to Mrs MacStinger, and kept prisoner by that lady in a secret chamber on a short allowance of victuals.