

Chapter L - Mr Toots's Complaint

There was an empty room above-stairs at the wooden Midshipman's, which, in days of yore, had been Walter's bedroom. Walter, rousing up the Captain betimes in the morning, proposed that they should carry thither such furniture out of the little parlour as would grace it best, so that Florence might take possession of it when she rose. As nothing could be more agreeable to Captain Cuttle than making himself very red and short of breath in such a cause, he turned to (as he himself said) with a will; and, in a couple of hours, this garret was transformed into a species of land-cabin, adorned with all the choicest moveables out of the parlour, inclusive even of the Tartar frigate, which the Captain hung up over the chimney-piece with such extreme delight, that he could do nothing for half-an-hour afterwards but walk backward from it, lost in admiration.

The Captain could be induced by no persuasion of Walter's to wind up the big watch, or to take back the canister, or to touch the sugar-tongs and teaspoons. 'No, no, my lad;' was the Captain's invariable reply to any solicitation of the kind, 'I've made that there little property over, jintly.' These words he repeated with great unction and gravity, evidently believing that they had the virtue of an Act of Parliament, and that unless he committed himself by some new admission of ownership, no flaw could be found in such a form of conveyance.

It was an advantage of the new arrangement, that besides the greater seclusion it afforded Florence, it admitted of the Midshipman being restored to his usual post of observation, and also of the shop shutters being taken down. The latter ceremony, however little importance the unconscious Captain attached to it, was not wholly superfluous; for, on the previous day, so much excitement had been occasioned in the neighbourhood, by the shutters remaining unopened, that the Instrument-maker's house had been honoured with an unusual share of public observation, and had been intently stared at from the opposite side of the way, by groups of hungry gazers, at any time between sunrise and sunset. The idlers and vagabonds had been particularly interested in the Captain's fate; constantly grovelling in the mud to apply their eyes to the cellar-grating, under the shop-window, and delighting their imaginations with the fancy that they could see a piece of his coat as he hung in a corner; though this settlement of him was stoutly disputed by an opposite faction, who were of opinion that he lay murdered with a hammer, on the stairs. It was not without exciting some discontent, therefore, that the subject of these rumours was seen early in the morning standing at his shop-door as hale and hearty as if nothing had happened; and the beadle of that quarter, a man of an ambitious character, who had expected to have the distinction of being present at the breaking open of the door, and of giving evidence in full uniform

before the coroner, went so far as to say to an opposite neighbour, that the chap in the glazed hat had better not try it on there - without more particularly mentioning what - and further, that he, the beadle, would keep his eye upon him.

'Captain Cuttle,' said Walter, musing, when they stood resting from their labours at the shop-door, looking down the old familiar street; it being still early in the morning; 'nothing at all of Uncle Sol, in all that time!'

'Nothing at all, my lad,' replied the Captain, shaking his head.

'Gone in search of me, dear, kind old man,' said Walter: 'yet never write to you! But why not? He says, in effect, in this packet that you gave me,' taking the paper from his pocket, which had been opened in the presence of the enlightened Bunsby, 'that if you never hear from him before opening it, you may believe him dead. Heaven forbid! But you would have heard of him, even if he were dead! Someone would have written, surely, by his desire, if he could not; and have said, 'on such a day, there died in my house,' or 'under my care,' or so forth, 'Mr Solomon Gills of London, who left this last remembrance and this last request to you'.'

The Captain, who had never climbed to such a clear height of probability before, was greatly impressed by the wide prospect it opened, and answered, with a thoughtful shake of his head, 'Well said, my lad; wery well said.'

'I have been thinking of this, or, at least,' said Walter, colouring, 'I have been thinking of one thing and another, all through a sleepless night, and I cannot believe, Captain Cuttle, but that my Uncle Sol (Lord bless him!) is alive, and will return. I don't so much wonder at his going away, because, leaving out of consideration that spice of the marvellous which was always in his character, and his great affection for me, before which every other consideration of his life became nothing, as no one ought to know so well as I who had the best of fathers in him,' - Walter's voice was indistinct and husky here, and he looked away, along the street, - 'leaving that out of consideration, I say, I have often read and heard of people who, having some near and dear relative, who was supposed to be shipwrecked at sea, have gone down to live on that part of the sea-shore where any tidings of the missing ship might be expected to arrive, though only an hour or two sooner than elsewhere, or have even gone upon her track to the place whither she was bound, as if their going would create intelligence. I think I should do such a thing myself, as soon as another, or sooner than many, perhaps. But why my Uncle shouldn't write to you, when he so clearly intended to do so, or how he should die abroad, and you not know it through some other hand, I cannot make out.'

Captain Cuttle observed, with a shake of his head, that Jack Bunsby himself hadn't made it out, and that he was a man as could give a pretty taut opinion too.

'If my Uncle had been a heedless young man, likely to be entrapped by jovial company to some drinking-place, where he was to be got rid of for the sake of what money he might have about him,' said Walter; 'or if he had been a reckless sailor, going ashore with two or three months' pay in his pocket, I could understand his disappearing, and leaving no trace behind. But, being what he was - and is, I hope - I can't believe it.'

'Wal'r, my lad,' inquired the Captain, wistfully eyeing him as he pondered and pondered, 'what do you make of it, then?'

'Captain Cuttle,' returned Walter, 'I don't know what to make of it. I suppose he never has written! There is no doubt about that?'

'If so be as Sol Gills wrote, my lad,' replied the Captain, argumentatively, 'where's his dispatch?'

'Say that he entrusted it to some private hand,' suggested Walter, 'and that it has been forgotten, or carelessly thrown aside, or lost. Even that is more probable to me, than the other event. In short, I not only cannot bear to contemplate that other event, Captain Cuttle, but I can't, and won't.'

'Hope, you see, Wal'r,' said the Captain, sagely, 'Hope. It's that as animates you. Hope is a buoy, for which you overhaul your Little Warbler, sentimental diwision, but Lord, my lad, like any other buoy, it only floats; it can't be steered nowhere. Along with the figure-head of Hope,' said the Captain, 'there's a anchor; but what's the good of my having a anchor, if I can't find no bottom to let it go in?'

Captain Cuttle said this rather in his character of a sagacious citizen and householder, bound to impart a morsel from his stores of wisdom to an inexperienced youth, than in his own proper person. Indeed, his face was quite luminous as he spoke, with new hope, caught from Walter; and he appropriately concluded by slapping him on the back; and saying, with enthusiasm, 'Hooroar, my lad! Indiividually, I'm o' your opinion.' Walter, with his cheerful laugh, returned the salutation, and said:

'Only one word more about my Uncle at present' Captain Cuttle. I suppose it is impossible that he can have written in the ordinary course - by mail packet, or ship letter, you understand - '

'Ay, ay, my lad,' said the Captain approvingly.

And that you have missed the letter, anyhow?'

'Why, Wal'r,' said the Captain, turning his eyes upon him with a faint approach to a severe expression, 'ain't I been on the look-out for any tidings of that man o' science, old Sol Gills, your Uncle, day and night, ever since I lost him? Ain't my heart been heavy and watchful always, along of him and you? Sleeping and waking, ain't I been upon my post, and wouldn't I scorn to quit it while this here Midshipman held together!'

'Yes, Captain Cuttle,' replied Walter, grasping his hand, 'I know you would, and I know how faithful and earnest all you say and feel is. I am sure of it. You don't doubt that I am as sure of it as I am that my foot is again upon this door-step, or that I again have hold of this true hand. Do you?'

'No, no, Wal'r,' returned the Captain, with his beaming

'I'll hazard no more conjectures,' said Walter, fervently shaking the hard hand of the Captain, who shook his with no less goodwill. 'All I will add is, Heaven forbid that I should touch my Uncle's possessions, Captain Cuttle! Everything that he left here, shall remain in the care of the truest of stewards and kindest of men - and if his name is not Cuttle, he has no name! Now, best of friends, about - Miss Dombey.'

There was a change in Walter's manner, as he came to these two words; and when he uttered them, all his confidence and cheerfulness appeared to have deserted him.

'I thought, before Miss Dombey stopped me when I spoke of her father last night,' said Walter, ' - you remember how?'

The Captain well remembered, and shook his head.

'I thought,' said Walter, 'before that, that we had but one hard duty to perform, and that it was, to prevail upon her to communicate with her friends, and to return home.'

The Captain muttered a feeble 'Awast!' or a 'Stand by!' or something or other, equally pertinent to the occasion; but it was rendered so extremely feeble by the total discomfiture with which he received this announcement, that what it was, is mere matter of conjecture.

'But,' said Walter, 'that is over. I think so, no longer. I would sooner be put back again upon that piece of wreck, on which I have so often floated, since my preservation, in my dreams, and there left to drift, and drive, and die!'

'Hooroar, my lad!' exclaimed the Captain, in a burst of uncontrollable satisfaction. 'Hooroar! hooroar! hooroar!'

'To think that she, so young, so good, and beautiful,' said Walter, 'so delicately brought up, and born to such a different fortune, should strive with the rough world! But we have seen the gulf that cuts off all behind her, though no one but herself can know how deep it is; and there is no return.

Captain Cuttle, without quite understanding this, greatly approved of it, and observed in a tone of strong corroboration, that the wind was quite abaft.

'She ought not to be alone here; ought she, Captain Cuttle?' said Walter, anxiously.

'Well, my lad,' replied the Captain, after a little sagacious consideration. 'I don't know. You being here to keep her company, you see, and you two being jintly - '

'Dear Captain Cuttle!' remonstrated Walter. 'I being here! Miss Dombey, in her guileless innocent heart, regards me as her adopted brother; but what would the guile and guilt of my heart be, if I pretended to believe that I had any right to approach her, familiarly, in that character - if I pretended to forget that I am bound, in honour, not to do it?'

'Wal'r, my lad,' hinted the Captain, with some revival of his discomfiture, 'ain't there no other character as - '

'Oh!' returned Walter, 'would you have me die in her esteem - in such esteem as hers - and put a veil between myself and her angel's face for ever, by taking advantage of her being here for refuge, so trusting and so unprotected, to endeavour to exalt myself into her lover? What do I say? There is no one in the world who would be more opposed to me if I could do so, than you.'

'Wal'r, my lad,' said the Captain, drooping more and more, 'prowiding as there is any just cause or impediment why two persons should not be jined together in the house of bondage, for which you'll overhaul the place and make a note, I hope I should declare it as promised and wowed in the banns. So there ain't no other character; ain't there, my lad?'

Walter briskly waved his hand in the negative.

'Well, my lad,' growled the Captain slowly, 'I won't deny but what I find myself wery much down by the head, along o' this here, or but

what I've gone clean about. But as to Lady lass, Wal'r, mind you, wot's respect and duty to her, is respect and duty in my articles, howsumever disapinting; and therefore I follows in your wake, my lad, and feel as you are, no doubt, acting up to yourself. And there ain't no other character, ain't there?' said the Captain, musing over the ruins of his fallen castle, with a very despondent face.

'Now, Captain Cuttle,' said Walter, starting a fresh point with a gayer air, to cheer the Captain up - but nothing could do that; he was too much concerned - 'I think we should exert ourselves to find someone who would be a proper attendant for Miss Dombey while she remains here, and who may be trusted. None of her relations may. It's clear Miss Dombey feels that they are all subservient to her father. What has become of Susan?'

'The young woman?' returned the Captain. 'It's my belief as she was sent away again the will of Heart's Delight. I made a signal for her when Lady lass first come, and she rated of her wery high, and said she had been gone a long time.'

'Then,' said Walter, 'do you ask Miss Dombey where she's gone, and we'll try to find her. The morning's getting on, and Miss Dombey will soon be rising. You are her best friend. Wait for her upstairs, and leave me to take care of all down here.'

The Captain, very crest-fallen indeed, echoed the sigh with which Walter said this, and complied. Florence was delighted with her new room, anxious to see Walter, and overjoyed at the prospect of greeting her old friend Susan. But Florence could not say where Susan was gone, except that it was in Essex, and no one could say, she remembered, unless it were Mr Toots.

With this information the melancholy Captain returned to Walter, and gave him to understand that Mr Toots was the young gentleman whom he had encountered on the door-step, and that he was a friend of his, and that he was a young gentleman of property, and that he hopelessly adored Miss Dombey. The Captain also related how the intelligence of Walter's supposed fate had first made him acquainted with Mr Toots, and how there was solemn treaty and compact between them, that Mr Toots should be mute upon the subject of his love.

The question then was, whether Florence could trust Mr Toots; and Florence saying, with a smile, 'Oh, yes, with her whole heart!' it became important to find out where Mr Toots lived. This, Florence didn't know, and the Captain had forgotten; and the Captain was telling Walter, in the little parlour, that Mr Toots was sure to be there soon, when in came Mr Toots himself.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, rushing into the parlour without any ceremony, 'I'm in a state of mind bordering on distraction!'

Mr Toots had discharged those words, as from a mortar, before he observed Walter, whom he recognised with what may be described as a chuckle of misery.

'You'll excuse me, Sir,' said Mr Toots, holding his forehead, 'but I'm at present in that state that my brain is going, if not gone, and anything approaching to politeness in an individual so situated would be a hollow mockery. Captain Gills, I beg to request the favour of a private interview.'

'Why, Brother,' returned the Captain, taking him by the hand, 'you are the man as we was on the look-out for.'

'Oh, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'what a look-out that must be, of which I am the object! I haven't dared to shave, I'm in that rash state. I haven't had my clothes brushed. My hair is matted together. I told the Chicken that if he offered to clean my boots, I'd stretch him a Corpse before me!'

All these indications of a disordered mind were verified in Mr Toots's appearance, which was wild and savage.

'See here, Brother,' said the Captain. 'This here's old Sol Gills's nevy Wal'r. Him as was supposed to have perished at sea'

Mr Toots took his hand from his forehead, and stared at Walter.

'Good gracious me!' stammered Mr Toots. 'What a complication of misery! How-de-do? I - I - I'm afraid you must have got very wet. Captain Gills, will you allow me a word in the shop?'

He took the Captain by the coat, and going out with him whispered:

'That then, Captain Gills, is the party you spoke of, when you said that he and Miss Dombey were made for one another?'

'Why, ay, my lad,' replied the disconsolate Captain; 'I was of that mind once.'

'And at this time!' exclaimed Mr Toots, with his hand to his forehead again. 'Of all others! - a hated rival! At least, he ain't a hated rival,' said Mr Toots, stopping short, on second thoughts, and taking away his hand; 'what should I hate him for? No. If my affection has been truly disinterested, Captain Gills, let me prove it now!'

Mr Toots shot back abruptly into the parlour, and said, wringing Walter by the hand:

'How-de-do? I hope you didn't take any cold. I - I shall be very glad if you'll give me the pleasure of your acquaintance. I wish you many happy returns of the day. Upon my word and honour,' said Mr Toots, warming as he became better acquainted with Walter's face and figure, 'I'm very glad to see you!'

'Thank you, heartily,' said Walter. 'I couldn't desire a more genuine and genial welcome.'

'Couldn't you, though?' said Mr Toots, still shaking his hand. 'It's very kind of you. I'm much obliged to you. How-de-do? I hope you left everybody quite well over the - that is, upon the - I mean wherever you came from last, you know.'

All these good wishes, and better intentions, Walter responded to manfully.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'I should wish to be strictly honourable; but I trust I may be allowed now, to allude to a certain subject that - '

'Ay, ay, my lad,' returned the Captain. 'Freely, freely.'

'Then, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'and Lieutenant Walters - are you aware that the most dreadful circumstances have been happening at Mr Dombey's house, and that Miss Dombey herself has left her father, who, in my opinion,' said Mr Toots, with great excitement, 'is a Brute, that it would be a flattery to call a - a marble monument, or a bird of prey, - and that she is not to be found, and has gone no one knows where?'

'May I ask how you heard this?' inquired Walter.

'Lieutenant Walters,' said Mr Toots, who had arrived at that appellation by a process peculiar to himself; probably by jumbling up his Christian name with the seafaring profession, and supposing some relationship between him and the Captain, which would extend, as a matter of course, to their titles; 'Lieutenant Walters, I can have no objection to make a straightforward reply. The fact is, that feeling extremely interested in everything that relates to Miss Dombey - not for any selfish reason, Lieutenant Walters, for I am well aware that the most able thing I could do for all parties would be to put an end to my existence, which can only be regarded as an inconvenience - I have been in the habit of bestowing a trifle now and then upon a footman; a most respectable young man, of the name of Towlinson, who has lived in the family some time; and Towlinson informed me, yesterday

evening, that this was the state of things. Since which, Captain Gills - and Lieutenant Walters - I have been perfectly frantic, and have been lying down on the sofa all night, the Ruin you behold.'

'Mr Toots,' said Walter, 'I am happy to be able to relieve your mind. Pray calm yourself. Miss Dombey is safe and well.'

'Sir!' cried Mr Toots, starting from his chair and shaking hands with him anew, 'the relief is so excessive, and unspeakable, that if you were to tell me now that Miss Dombey was married even, I could smile. Yes, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, appealing to him, 'upon my soul and body, I really think, whatever I might do to myself immediately afterwards, that I could smile, I am so relieved.'

'It will be a greater relief and delight still, to such a generous mind as yours,' said Walter, not at all slow in returning his greeting, 'to find that you can render service to Miss Dombey. Captain Cuttle, will you have the kindness to take Mr Toots upstairs?'

The Captain beckoned to Mr Toots, who followed him with a bewildered countenance, and, ascending to the top of the house, was introduced, without a word of preparation from his conductor, into Florence's new retreat.

Poor Mr Toots's amazement and pleasure at sight of her were such, that they could find a vent in nothing but extravagance. He ran up to her, seized her hand, kissed it, dropped it, seized it again, fell upon one knee, shed tears, chuckled, and was quite regardless of his danger of being pinned by Diogenes, who, inspired by the belief that there was something hostile to his mistress in these demonstrations, worked round and round him, as if only undecided at what particular point to go in for the assault, but quite resolved to do him a fearful mischief.

'Oh Di, you bad, forgetful dog! Dear Mr Toots, I am so rejoiced to see you!'

'Thankee,' said Mr Toots, 'I am pretty well, I'm much obliged to you, Miss Dombey. I hope all the family are the same.'

Mr Toots said this without the least notion of what he was talking about, and sat down on a chair, staring at Florence with the liveliest contention of delight and despair going on in his face that any face could exhibit.

'Captain Gills and Lieutenant Walters have mentioned, Miss Dombey,' gasped Mr Toots, 'that I can do you some service. If I could by any means wash out the remembrance of that day at Brighton, when I

conducted myself - much more like a Parricide than a person of independent property,' said Mr Toots, with severe self-accusation, 'I should sink into the silent tomb with a gleam of joy.'

'Pray, Mr Toots,' said Florence, 'do not wish me to forget anything in our acquaintance. I never can, believe me. You have been far too kind and good to me always.'

'Miss Dombey,' returned Mr Toots, 'your consideration for my feelings is a part of your angelic character. Thank you a thousand times. It's of no consequence at all.'

'What we thought of asking you,' said Florence, 'is, whether you remember where Susan, whom you were so kind as to accompany to the coach-office when she left me, is to be found.'

'Why I do not certainly, Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, after a little consideration, 'remember the exact name of the place that was on the coach; and I do recollect that she said she was not going to stop there, but was going farther on. But, Miss Dombey, if your object is to find her, and to have her here, myself and the Chicken will produce her with every dispatch that devotion on my part, and great intelligence on the Chicken's, can ensure.'

Mr Toots was so manifestly delighted and revived by the prospect of being useful, and the disinterested sincerity of his devotion was so unquestionable, that it would have been cruel to refuse him. Florence, with an instinctive delicacy, forbore to urge the least obstacle, though she did not forbear to overpower him with thanks; and Mr Toots proudly took the commission upon himself for immediate execution.

'Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, touching her proffered hand, with a pang of hopeless love visibly shooting through him, and flashing out in his face, 'Good-bye! Allow me to take the liberty of saying, that your misfortunes make me perfectly wretched, and that you may trust me, next to Captain Gills himself. I am quite aware, Miss Dombey, of my own deficiencies - they're not of the least consequence, thank you - but I am entirely to be relied upon, I do assure you, Miss Dombey.'

With that Mr Toots came out of the room, again accompanied by the Captain, who, standing at a little distance, holding his hat under his arm and arranging his scattered locks with his hook, had been a not uninterested witness of what passed. And when the door closed behind them, the light of Mr Toots's life was darkly clouded again.

'Captain Gills,' said that gentleman, stopping near the bottom of the stairs, and turning round, 'to tell you the truth, I am not in a frame of mind at the present moment, in which I could see Lieutenant Walters

with that entirely friendly feeling towards him that I should wish to harbour in my breast. We cannot always command our feelings, Captain Gills, and I should take it as a particular favour if you'd let me out at the private door.'

'Brother,' returned the Captain, 'you shall shape your own course. Wotever course you take, is plain and seamanlike, I'm wery sure.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'you're extremely kind. Your good opinion is a consolation to me. There is one thing,' said Mr Toots, standing in the passage, behind the half-opened door, 'that I hope you'll bear in mind, Captain Gills, and that I should wish Lieutenant Walters to be made acquainted with. I have quite come into my property now, you know, and - and I don't know what to do with it. If I could be at all useful in a pecuniary point of view, I should glide into the silent tomb with ease and smoothness.'

Mr Toots said no more, but slipped out quietly and shut the door upon himself, to cut the Captain off from any reply.

Florence thought of this good creature, long after he had left her, with mingled emotions of pain and pleasure. He was so honest and warm-hearted, that to see him again and be assured of his truth to her in her distress, was a joy and comfort beyond all price; but for that very reason, it was so affecting to think that she caused him a moment's unhappiness, or ruffled, by a breath, the harmless current of his life, that her eyes filled with tears, and her bosom overflowed with pity. Captain Cuttle, in his different way, thought much of Mr Toots too; and so did Walter; and when the evening came, and they were all sitting together in Florence's new room, Walter praised him in a most impassioned manner, and told Florence what he had said on leaving the house, with every graceful setting-off in the way of comment and appreciation that his own honesty and sympathy could surround it with.

Mr Toots did not return upon the next day, or the next, or for several days; and in the meanwhile Florence, without any new alarm, lived like a quiet bird in a cage, at the top of the old Instrument-maker's house. But Florence drooped and hung her head more and more plainly, as the days went on; and the expression that had been seen in the face of the dead child, was often turned to the sky from her high window, as if it sought his angel out, on the bright shore of which he had spoken: lying on his little bed.

Florence had been weak and delicate of late, and the agitation she had undergone was not without its influences on her health. But it was no bodily illness that affected her now. She was distressed in mind; and the cause of her distress was Walter.

Interested in her, anxious for her, proud and glad to serve her, and showing all this with the enthusiasm and ardour of his character, Florence saw that he avoided her. All the long day through, he seldom approached her room. If she asked for him, he came, again for the moment as earnest and as bright as she remembered him when she was a lost child in the staring streets; but he soon became constrained - her quick affection was too watchful not to know it - and uneasy, and soon left her. Unsought, he never came, all day, between the morning and the night. When the evening closed in, he was always there, and that was her happiest time, for then she half believed that the old Walter of her childhood was not changed. But, even then, some trivial word, look, or circumstance would show her that there was an indefinable division between them which could not be passed.

And she could not but see that these revealings of a great alteration in Walter manifested themselves in despite of his utmost efforts to hide them. In his consideration for her, she thought, and in the earnestness of his desire to spare her any wound from his kind hand, he resorted to innumerable little artifices and disguises. So much the more did Florence feel the greatness of the alteration in him; so much the oftener did she weep at this estrangement of her brother.

The good Captain - her untiring, tender, ever zealous friend - saw it, too, Florence thought, and it pained him. He was less cheerful and hopeful than he had been at first, and would steal looks at her and Walter, by turns, when they were all three together of an evening, with quite a sad face.

Florence resolved, at last, to speak to Walter. She believed she knew now what the cause of his estrangement was, and she thought it would be a relief to her full heart, and would set him more at ease, if she told him she had found it out, and quite submitted to it, and did not reproach him.

It was on a certain Sunday afternoon, that Florence took this resolution. The faithful Captain, in an amazing shirt-collar, was sitting by her, reading with his spectacles on, and she asked him where Walter was.

'I think he's down below, my lady lass,' returned the Captain.

'I should like to speak to him,' said Florence, rising hurriedly as if to go downstairs.

'I'll rouse him up here, Beauty,' said the Captain, 'in a trice.'

Thereupon the Captain, with much alacrity, shouldered his book - for he made it a point of duty to read none but very large books on a

Sunday, as having a more staid appearance: and had bargained, years ago, for a prodigious volume at a book-stall, five lines of which utterly confounded him at any time, insomuch that he had not yet ascertained of what subject it treated - and withdrew. Walter soon appeared.

'Captain Cuttle tells me, Miss Dombey,' he eagerly began on coming in - but stopped when he saw her face.

'You are not so well to-day. You look distressed. You have been weeping.'

He spoke so kindly, and with such a fervent tremor in his voice, that the tears gushed into her eyes at the sound of his words.

'Walter,' said Florence, gently, 'I am not quite well, and I have been weeping. I want to speak to you.'

He sat down opposite to her, looking at her beautiful and innocent face; and his own turned pale, and his lips trembled.

'You said, upon the night when I knew that you were saved - and oh! dear Walter, what I felt that night, and what I hoped!' - '

He put his trembling hand upon the table between them, and sat looking at her.

- 'that I was changed. I was surprised to hear you say so, but I understand, now, that I am. Don't be angry with me, Walter. I was too much overjoyed to think of it, then.'

She seemed a child to him again. It was the ingenuous, confiding, loving child he saw and heard. Not the dear woman, at whose feet he would have laid the riches of the earth.

'You remember the last time I saw you, Walter, before you went away?'

He put his hand into his breast, and took out a little purse.

'I have always worn it round my neck! If I had gone down in the deep, it would have been with me at the bottom of the sea.'

'And you will wear it still, Walter, for my old sake?'

'Until I die!'

She laid her hand on his, as fearlessly and simply, as if not a day had intervened since she gave him the little token of remembrance.

'I am glad of that. I shall be always glad to think so, Walter. Do you recollect that a thought of this change seemed to come into our minds at the same time that evening, when we were talking together?'

'No!' he answered, in a wondering tone.

'Yes, Walter. I had been the means of injuring your hopes and prospects even then. I feared to think so, then, but I know it now. If you were able, then, in your generosity, to hide from me that you knew it too, you cannot do so now, although you try as generously as before. You do. I thank you for it, Walter, deeply, truly; but you cannot succeed. You have suffered too much in your own hardships, and in those of your dearest relation, quite to overlook the innocent cause of all the peril and affliction that has befallen you. You cannot quite forget me in that character, and we can be brother and sister no longer. But, dear Walter, do not think that I complain of you in this. I might have known it - ought to have known it - but forgot it in my joy. All I hope is that you may think of me less irksomely when this feeling is no more a secret one; and all I ask is, Walter, in the name of the poor child who was your sister once, that you will not struggle with yourself, and pain yourself, for my sake, now that I know all!'

Walter had looked upon her while she said this, with a face so full of wonder and amazement, that it had room for nothing else. Now he caught up the hand that touched his, so entreatingly, and held it between his own.

'Oh, Miss Dombey,' he said, 'is it possible that while I have been suffering so much, in striving with my sense of what is due to you, and must be rendered to you, I have made you suffer what your words disclose to me? Never, never, before Heaven, have I thought of you but as the single, bright, pure, blessed recollection of my boyhood and my youth. Never have I from the first, and never shall I to the last, regard your part in my life, but as something sacred, never to be lightly thought of, never to be esteemed enough, never, until death, to be forgotten. Again to see you look, and hear you speak, as you did on that night when we parted, is happiness to me that there are no words to utter; and to be loved and trusted as your brother, is the next gift I could receive and prize!'

'Walter,' said Florence, looking at him earnestly, but with a changing face, 'what is that which is due to me, and must be rendered to me, at the sacrifice of all this?'

'Respect,' said Walter, in a low tone. 'Reverence.'

The colour dawned in her face, and she timidly and thoughtfully withdrew her hand; still looking at him with unabated earnestness.

'I have not a brother's right,' said Walter. 'I have not a brother's claim. I left a child. I find a woman.'

The colour overspread her face. She made a gesture as if of entreaty that he would say no more, and her face dropped upon her hands.

They were both silent for a time; she weeping.

'I owe it to a heart so trusting, pure, and good,' said Walter, 'even to tear myself from it, though I rend my own. How dare I say it is my sister's!'

She was weeping still.

'If you had been happy; surrounded as you should be by loving and admiring friends, and by all that makes the station you were born to enviable,' said Walter; 'and if you had called me brother, then, in your affectionate remembrance of the past, I could have answered to the name from my distant place, with no inward assurance that I wronged your spotless truth by doing so. But here - and now!'

'Oh thank you, thank you, Walter! Forgive my having wronged you so much. I had no one to advise me. I am quite alone.'

'Florence!' said Walter, passionately. 'I am hurried on to say, what I thought, but a few moments ago, nothing could have forced from my lips. If I had been prosperous; if I had any means or hope of being one day able to restore you to a station near your own; I would have told you that there was one name you might bestow upon - me - a right above all others, to protect and cherish you - that I was worthy of in nothing but the love and honour that I bore you, and in my whole heart being yours. I would have told you that it was the only claim that you could give me to defend and guard you, which I dare accept and dare assert; but that if I had that right, I would regard it as a trust so precious and so priceless, that the undivided truth and fervour of my life would poorly acknowledge its worth.'

The head was still bent down, the tears still falling, and the bosom swelling with its sobs.

'Dear Florence! Dearest Florence! whom I called so in my thoughts before I could consider how presumptuous and wild it was. One last time let me call you by your own dear name, and touch this gentle hand in token of your sisterly forgetfulness of what I have said.'

She raised her head, and spoke to him with such a solemn sweetness in her eyes; with such a calm, bright, placid smile shining on him through her tears; with such a low, soft tremble in her frame and

voice; that the innermost chords of his heart were touched, and his sight was dim as he listened.

'No, Walter, I cannot forget it. I would not forget it, for the world. Are you - are you very poor?'

'I am but a wanderer,' said Walter, 'making voyages to live, across the sea. That is my calling now.'

'Are you soon going away again, Walter?'

'Very soon.'

She sat looking at him for a moment; then timidly put her trembling hand in his.

'If you will take me for your wife, Walter, I will love you dearly. If you will let me go with you, Walter, I will go to the world's end without fear. I can give up nothing for you - I have nothing to resign, and no one to forsake; but all my love and life shall be devoted to you, and with my last breath I will breathe your name to God if I have sense and memory left.'

He caught her to his heart, and laid her cheek against his own, and now, no more repulsed, no more forlorn, she wept indeed, upon the breast of her dear lover.

Blessed Sunday Bells, ringing so tranquilly in their entranced and happy ears! Blessed Sunday peace and quiet, harmonising with the calmness in their souls, and making holy air around them! Blessed twilight stealing on, and shading her so soothingly and gravely, as she falls asleep, like a hushed child, upon the bosom she has clung to!

Oh load of love and trustfulness that lies so lightly there! Ay, look down on the closed eyes, Walter, with a proudly tender gaze; for in all the wide wide world they seek but thee now - only thee!

The Captain remained in the little parlour until it was quite dark. He took the chair on which Walter had been sitting, and looked up at the skylight, until the day, by little and little, faded away, and the stars peeped down. He lighted a candle, lighted a pipe, smoked it out, and wondered what on earth was going on upstairs, and why they didn't call him to tea.

Florence came to his side while he was in the height of his wonderment.

'Ay! lady lass!' cried the Captain. 'Why, you and Wal'r have had a long spell o' talk, my beauty.'

Florence put her little hand round one of the great buttons of his coat, and said, looking down into his face:

'Dear Captain, I want to tell you something, if you please.'

The Captain raised his head pretty smartly, to hear what it was. Catching by this means a more distinct view of Florence, he pushed back his chair, and himself with it, as far as they could go.

'What! Heart's Delight!' cried the Captain, suddenly elated, 'Is it that?'

'Yes!' said Florence, eagerly.

'Wal'r! Husband! THAT?' roared the Captain, tossing up his glazed hat into the skylight.

'Yes!' cried Florence, laughing and crying together.

The Captain immediately hugged her; and then, picking up the glazed hat and putting it on, drew her arm through his, and conducted her upstairs again; where he felt that the great joke of his life was now to be made.

'What, Wal'r my lad!' said the Captain, looking in at the door, with his face like an amiable warming-pan. 'So there ain't NO other character, ain't there?'

He had like to have suffocated himself with this pleasantry, which he repeated at least forty times during tea; polishing his radiant face with the sleeve of his coat, and dabbing his head all over with his pocket-handkerchief, in the intervals. But he was not without a graver source of enjoyment to fall back upon, when so disposed, for he was repeatedly heard to say in an undertone, as he looked with ineffable delight at Walter and Florence:

'Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad, you never shaped a better course in your life, than when you made that there little property over, jintly!'