

## Chapter LII - Secret Intelligence

Good Mrs Brown and her daughter Alice kept silent company together, in their own dwelling. It was early in the evening, and late in the spring. But a few days had elapsed since Mr Dombey had told Major Bagstock of his singular intelligence, singularly obtained, which might turn out to be valueless, and might turn out to be true; and the world was not satisfied yet.

The mother and daughter sat for a long time without interchanging a word: almost without motion. The old woman's face was shrewdly anxious and expectant; that of her daughter was expectant too, but in a less sharp degree, and sometimes it darkened, as if with gathering disappointment and incredulity. The old woman, without heeding these changes in its expression, though her eyes were often turned towards it, sat mumbling and munching, and listening confidently.

Their abode, though poor and miserable, was not so utterly wretched as in the days when only Good Mrs Brown inhabited it. Some few attempts at cleanliness and order were manifest, though made in a reckless, gipsy way, that might have connected them, at a glance, with the younger woman. The shades of evening thickened and deepened as the two kept silence, until the blackened walls were nearly lost in the prevailing gloom.

Then Alice broke the silence which had lasted so long, and said:

'You may give him up, mother. He'll not come here.'

'Death give him up!' returned the old woman, impatiently. 'He will come here.'

'We shall see,' said Alice.

'We shall see him,' returned her mother.

'And doomsday,' said the daughter.

'You think I'm in my second childhood, I know!' croaked the old woman. 'That's the respect and duty that I get from my own gal, but I'm wiser than you take me for. He'll come. T'other day when I touched his coat in the street, he looked round as if I was a toad. But Lord, to see him when I said their names, and asked him if he'd like to find out where they was!'

'Was it so angry?' asked her daughter, roused to interest in a moment.

'Angry? ask if it was bloody. That's more like the word. Angry? Ha, ha! To call that only angry!' said the old woman, hobbling to the cupboard, and lighting a candle, which displayed the workings of her mouth to ugly advantage, as she brought it to the table. 'I might as well call your face only angry, when you think or talk about 'em.'

It was something different from that, truly, as she sat as still as a crouched tigress, with her kindling eyes.

'Hark!' said the old woman, triumphantly. 'I hear a step coming. It's not the tread of anyone that lives about here, or comes this way often. We don't walk like that. We should grow proud on such neighbours! Do you hear him?'

'I believe you are right, mother,' replied Alice, in a low voice. 'Peace! open the door.'

As she drew herself within her shawl, and gathered it about her, the old woman complied; and peering out, and beckoning, gave admission to Mr Dombey, who stopped when he had set his foot within the door, and looked distrustfully around.

'It's a poor place for a great gentleman like your worship,' said the old woman, curtsying and chattering. 'I told you so, but there's no harm in it.'

'Who is that?' asked Mr Dombey, looking at her companion.

'That's my handsome daughter,' said the old woman. 'Your worship won't mind her. She knows all about it.'

A shadow fell upon his face not less expressive than if he had groaned aloud, 'Who does not know all about it!' but he looked at her steadily, and she, without any acknowledgment of his presence, looked at him. The shadow on his face was darker when he turned his glance away from her; and even then it wandered back again, furtively, as if he were haunted by her bold eyes, and some remembrance they inspired.

'Woman,' said Mr Dombey to the old witch who was chuckling and leering close at his elbow, and who, when he turned to address her, pointed stealthily at her daughter, and rubbed her hands, and pointed again, 'Woman! I believe that I am weak and forgetful of my station in coming here, but you know why I come, and what you offered when you stopped me in the street the other day. What is it that you have to tell me concerning what I want to know; and how does it happen that I can find voluntary intelligence in a hovel like this,' with a disdainful glance about him, 'when I have exerted my power and means to obtain it in vain? I do not think,' he said, after a moment's pause, during

which he had observed her, sternly, 'that you are so audacious as to mean to trifle with me, or endeavour to impose upon me. But if you have that purpose, you had better stop on the threshold of your scheme. My humour is not a trifling one, and my acknowledgment will be severe.'

'Oh a proud, hard gentleman!' chuckled the old woman, shaking her head, and rubbing her shrivelled hands, 'oh hard, hard, hard! But your worship shall see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears; not with ours - and if your worship's put upon their track, you won't mind paying something for it, will you, honourable deary?'

'Money,' returned Mr Dombey, apparently relieved, and assured by this inquiry, 'will bring about unlikely things, I know. It may turn even means as unexpected and unpromising as these, to account. Yes. For any reliable information I receive, I will pay. But I must have the information first, and judge for myself of its value.'

'Do you know nothing more powerful than money?' asked the younger woman, without rising, or altering her attitude.

'Not here, I should imagine,' said Mr Dombey.

'You should know of something that is more powerful elsewhere, as I judge,' she returned. 'Do you know nothing of a woman's anger?'

'You have a saucy tongue, Jade,' said Mr Dombey.

'Not usually,' she answered, without any show of emotion: 'I speak to you now, that you may understand us better, and rely more on us. A woman's anger is pretty much the same here, as in your fine house. I am angry. I have been so, many years. I have as good cause for my anger as you have for yours, and its object is the same man.'

He started, in spite of himself, and looked at her with

astonishment.

'Yes,' she said, with a kind of laugh. 'Wide as the distance may seem between us, it is so. How it is so, is no matter; that is my story, and I keep my story to myself. I would bring you and him together, because I have a rage against him. My mother there, is avaricious and poor; and she would sell any tidings she could glean, or anything, or anybody, for money. It is fair enough, perhaps, that you should pay her some, if she can help you to what you want to know. But that is not my motive. I have told you what mine is, and it would be as strong and all-sufficient with me if you haggled and bargained with her for a

sixpence. I have done. My saucy tongue says no more, if you wait here till sunrise tomorrow.'

The old woman, who had shown great uneasiness during this speech, which had a tendency to depreciate her expected gains, pulled Mr Dombey softly by the sleeve, and whispered to him not to mind her. He glared at them both, by turns, with a haggard look, and said, in a deeper voice than was usual with him:

'Go on - what do you know?'

'Oh, not so fast, your worship! we must wait for someone,' answered the old woman. 'It's to be got from someone else - wormed out - screwed and twisted from him.'

'What do you mean?' said Mr Dombey.

'Patience,' she croaked, laying her hand, like a claw, upon his arm. 'Patience. I'll get at it. I know I can! If he was to hold it back from me,' said Good Mrs Brown, crooking her ten fingers, 'I'd tear it out of him!'

Mr Dombey followed her with his eyes as she hobbled to the door, and looked out again: and then his glance sought her daughter; but she remained impassive, silent, and regardless of him.

'Do you tell me, woman,' he said, when the bent figure of Mrs Brown came back, shaking its head and chattering to itself, 'that there is another person expected here?'

'Yes!' said the old woman, looking up into his face, and nodding.

'From whom you are to exact the intelligence that is to be useful to me?'

'Yes,' said the old woman, nodding again.

'A stranger?'

'Chut!' said the old woman, with a shrill laugh. 'What signifies! Well, well; no. No stranger to your worship. But he won't see you. He'd be afraid of you, and wouldn't talk. You'll stand behind that door, and judge him for yourself. We don't ask to be believed on trust What! Your worship doubts the room behind the door? Oh the suspicion of you rich gentlefolks! Look at it, then.'

Her sharp eye had detected an involuntary expression of this feeling on his part, which was not unreasonable under the circumstances. In satisfaction of it she now took the candle to the door she spoke of. Mr

Dombey looked in; assured himself that it was an empty, crazy room; and signed to her to put the light back in its place.

'How long,' he asked, 'before this person comes?'

'Not long,' she answered. 'Would your worship sit down for a few odd minutes?'

He made no answer; but began pacing the room with an irresolute air, as if he were undecided whether to remain or depart, and as if he had some quarrel with himself for being there at all. But soon his tread grew slower and heavier, and his face more sternly thoughtfull; as the object with which he had come, fixed itself in his mind, and dilated there again.

While he thus walked up and down with his eyes on the ground, Mrs Brown, in the chair from which she had risen to receive him, sat listening anew. The monotony of his step, or the uncertainty of age, made her so slow of hearing, that a footfall without had sounded in her daughter's ears for some moments, and she had looked up hastily to warn her mother of its approach, before the old woman was roused by it. But then she started from her seat, and whispering 'Here he is!' hurried her visitor to his place of observation, and put a bottle and glass upon the table, with such alacrity, as to be ready to fling her arms round the neck of Rob the Grinder on his appearance at the door.

'And here's my bonny boy,' cried Mrs Brown, 'at last! - oho, oho! You're like my own son, Robby!'

'Oh! Misses Brown!' remonstrated the Grinder. 'Don't! Can't you be fond of a cove without squeegeing and throttling of him? Take care of the birdcage in my hand, will you?'

'Thinks of a birdcage, afore me!' cried the old woman, apostrophizing the ceiling. 'Me that feels more than a mother for him!'

'Well, I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, Misses Brown,' said the unfortunate youth, greatly aggravated; 'but you're so jealous of a cove. I'm very fond of you myself, and all that, of course; but I don't smother you, do I, Misses Brown?'

He looked and spoke as if he would have been far from objecting to do so, however, on a favourable occasion.

'And to talk about birdcages, too!' whimpered the Grinder. 'As if that was a crime! Why, look'ee here! Do you know who this belongs to?'

'To Master, dear?' said the old woman with a grin.

'Ah!' replied the Grinder, lifting a large cage tied up in a wrapper, on the table, and untying it with his teeth and hands. 'It's our parrot, this is.'

'Mr Carker's parrot, Rob?'

'Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?' returned the goaded Grinder. 'What do you go naming names for? I'm blest,' said Rob, pulling his hair with both hands in the exasperation of his feelings, 'if she ain't enough to make a cove run wild!'

'What! Do you snub me, thankless boy!' cried the old woman, with ready vehemence.

'Good gracious, Misses Brown, no!' returned the Grinder, with tears in his eyes. 'Was there ever such a - ! Don't I dote upon you, Misses Brown?'

'Do you, sweet Rob? Do you truly, chickabiddy?' With that, Mrs Brown held him in her fond embrace once more; and did not release him until he had made several violent and ineffectual struggles with his legs, and his hair was standing on end all over his head.

'Oh!' returned the Grinder, 'what a thing it is to be perfectly pitched into with affection like this here. I wish she was - How have you been, Misses Brown?'

'Ah! Not here since this night week!' said the old woman, contemplating him with a look of reproach.

'Good gracious, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder, 'I said tonight's a week, that I'd come tonight, didn't I? And here I am. How you do go on! I wish you'd be a little rational, Misses Brown. I'm hoarse with saying things in my defence, and my very face is shiny with being hugged!' He rubbed it hard with his sleeve, as if to remove the tender polish in question.

'Drink a little drop to comfort you, my Robin,' said the old woman, filling the glass from the bottle and giving it to him.

'Thank'ee, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder. 'Here's your health. And long may you - et ceterer.' Which, to judge from the expression of his face, did not include any very choice blessings. 'And here's her health,' said the Grinder, glancing at Alice, who sat with her eyes fixed, as it seemed to him, on the wall behind him, but in reality on

Mr Dombey's face at the door, 'and wishing her the same and many of 'em!'

He drained the glass to these two sentiments, and set it down.

'Well, I say, Misses Brown!' he proceeded. 'To go on a little rational now. You're a judge of birds, and up to their ways, as I know to my cost.'

'Cost!' repeated Mrs Brown.

'Satisfaction, I mean,' returned the Grinder. 'How you do take up a cove, Misses Brown! You've put it all out of my head again.'

'Judge of birds, Robby,' suggested the old woman.

'Ah!' said the Grinder. 'Well, I've got to take care of this parrot - certain things being sold, and a certain establishment broke up - and as I don't want no notice took at present, I wish you'd attend to her for a week or so, and give her board and lodging, will you? If I must come backwards and forwards,' mused the Grinder with a dejected face, 'I may as well have something to come for.'

'Something to come for?' screamed the old woman.

'Besides you, I mean, Misses Brown,' returned the craven Rob. 'Not that I want any inducement but yourself, Misses Brown, I'm sure. Don't begin again, for goodness' sake.'

'He don't care for me! He don't care for me, as I care for him!' cried Mrs Brown, lifting up her skinny hands. 'But I'll take care of his bird.'

'Take good care of it too, you know, Mrs Brown,' said Rob, shaking his head. 'If you was so much as to stroke its feathers once the wrong way, I believe it would be found out.'

'Ah, so sharp as that, Rob?' said Mrs Brown, quickly.

'Sharp, Misses Brown!' repeated Rob. 'But this is not to be talked about.'

Checking himself abruptly, and not without a fearful glance across the room, Rob filled the glass again, and having slowly emptied it, shook his head, and began to draw his fingers across and across the wires of the parrot's cage by way of a diversion from the dangerous theme that had just been broached.

The old woman eyed him slyly, and hitching her chair nearer his, and looking in at the parrot, who came down from the gilded dome at her call, said:

'Out of place now, Robby?'

'Never you mind, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder, shortly.

'Board wages, perhaps, Rob?' said Mrs Brown.

'Pretty Polly!' said the Grinder.

The old woman darted a glance at him that might have warned him to consider his ears in danger, but it was his turn to look in at the parrot now, and however expressive his imagination may have made her angry scowl, it was unseen by his bodily eyes.

'I wonder Master didn't take you with him, Rob,' said the old woman, in a wheedling voice, but with increased malignity of aspect.

Rob was so absorbed in contemplation of the parrot, and in trolling his forefinger on the wires, that he made no answer.

The old woman had her clutch within a hair's breadth of his shock of hair as it stooped over the table; but she restrained her fingers, and said, in a voice that choked with its efforts to be coaxing:

'Robby, my child.'

'Well, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder.

'I say I wonder Master didn't take you with him, dear.'

'Never you mind, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder.

Mrs Brown instantly directed the clutch of her right hand at his hair, and the clutch of her left hand at his throat, and held on to the object of her fond affection with such extraordinary fury, that his face began to blacken in a moment.

'Misses Brown!' exclaimed the Grinder, 'let go, will you? What are you doing of? Help, young woman! Misses Brow- Brow- !'

The young woman, however, equally unmoved by his direct appeal to her, and by his inarticulate utterance, remained quite neutral, until, after struggling with his assailant into a corner, Rob disengaged himself, and stood there panting and fenced in by his own elbows, while the old woman, panting too, and stamping with rage and



eagerness, appeared to be collecting her energies for another swoop upon him. At this crisis Alice interposed her voice, but not in the Grinder's favour, by saying,

'Well done, mother. Tear him to pieces!'

'What, young woman!' blubbered Rob; 'are you against me too? What have I been and done? What am I to be tore to pieces for, I should like to know? Why do you take and choke a cove who has never done you any harm, neither of you? Call yourselves females, too!' said the frightened and afflicted Grinder, with his coat-cuff at his eye. 'I'm surprised at you! Where's your feminine tenderness?'

'You thankless dog!' gasped Mrs Brown. 'You impudent insulting dog!'

'What have I been and done to go and give you offence, Misses Brown?' retorted the fearful Rob. 'You was very much attached to me a minute ago.'

'To cut me off with his short answers and his sulky words,' said the old woman. 'Me! Because I happen to be curious to have a little bit of gossip about Master and the lady, to dare to play at fast and loose with me! But I'll talk to you no more, my lad. Now go!'

'I'm sure, Misses Brown,' returned the abject Grinder, 'I never insinuated that I wished to go. Don't talk like that, Misses Brown, if you please.'

'I won't talk at all,' said Mrs Brown, with an action of her crooked fingers that made him shrink into half his natural compass in the corner. 'Not another word with him shall pass my lips. He's an ungrateful hound. I cast him off. Now let him go! And I'll slip those after him that shall talk too much; that won't be shook away; that'll hang to him like leeches, and slink arter him like foxes. What! He knows 'em. He knows his old games and his old ways. If he's forgotten 'em, they'll soon remind him. Now let him go, and see how he'll do Master's business, and keep Master's secrets, with such company always following him up and down. Ha, ha, ha! He'll find 'em a different sort from you and me, Ally; Close as he is with you and me. Now let him go, now let him go!'

The old woman, to the unspeakable dismay of the Grinder, walked her twisted figure round and round, in a ring of some four feet in diameter, constantly repeating these words, and shaking her fist above her head, and working her mouth about.

'Misses Brown,' pleaded Rob, coming a little out of his corner, 'I'm sure you wouldn't injure a cove, on second thoughts, and in cold blood, would you?'

'Don't talk to me,' said Mrs Brown, still wrathfully pursuing her circle. 'Now let him go, now let him go!'

'Misses Brown,' urged the tormented Grinder, 'I didn't mean to - Oh, what a thing it is for a cove to get into such a line as this! - I was only careful of talking, Misses Brown, because I always am, on account of his being up to everything; but I might have known it wouldn't have gone any further. I'm sure I'm quite agreeable,' with a wretched face, 'for any little bit of gossip, Misses Brown. Don't go on like this, if you please. Oh, couldn't you have the goodness to put in a word for a miserable cove, here?' said the Grinder, appealing in desperation to the daughter.

'Come, mother, you hear what he says,' she interposed, in her stern voice, and with an impatient action of her head; 'try him once more, and if you fall out with him again, ruin him, if you like, and have done with him.'

Mrs Brown, moved as it seemed by this very tender exhortation, presently began to howl; and softening by degrees, took the apologetic Grinder to her arms, who embraced her with a face of unutterable woe, and like a victim as he was, resumed his former seat, close by the side of his venerable friend, whom he suffered, not without much constrained sweetness of countenance, combating very expressive physiognomical revelations of an opposite character to draw his arm through hers, and keep it there.

'And how's Master, deary dear?' said Mrs Brown, when, sitting in this amicable posture, they had pledged each other.

'Hush! If you'd be so good, Misses Brown, as to speak a little lower,' Rob implored. 'Why, he's pretty well, thank'ee, I suppose.'

'You're not out of place, Robby?' said Mrs Brown, in a wheedling tone.

'Why, I'm not exactly out of place, nor in,' faltered Rob. 'I - I'm still in pay, Misses Brown.'

'And nothing to do, Rob?'

'Nothing particular to do just now, Misses Brown, but to - keep my eyes open, said the Grinder, rolling them in a forlorn way.

'Master abroad, Rob?'

'Oh, for goodness' sake, Misses Brown, couldn't you gossip with a cove about anything else?' cried the Grinder, in a burst of despair.

The impetuous Mrs Brown rising directly, the tortured Grinder detained her, stammering 'Ye-es, Misses Brown, I believe he's abroad. What's she staring at?' he added, in allusion to the daughter, whose eyes were fixed upon the face that now again looked out behind

'Don't mind her, lad,' said the old woman, holding him closer to prevent his turning round. 'It's her way - her way. Tell me, Rob. Did you ever see the lady, deary?'

'Oh, Misses Brown, what lady?' cried the Grinder in a tone of piteous supplication.

'What lady?' she retorted. 'The lady; Mrs Dombey.'

'Yes, I believe I see her once,' replied Rob.

'The night she went away, Robby, eh?' said the old woman in his ear, and taking note of every change in his face. 'Aha! I know it was that night.'

'Well, if you know it was that night, you know, Misses Brown,' replied Rob, 'it's no use putting pinchers into a cove to make him say so.'

'Where did they go that night, Rob? Straight away? How did they go? Where did you see her? Did she laugh? Did she cry? Tell me all about it,' cried the old hag, holding him closer yet, patting the hand that was drawn through his arm against her other hand, and searching every line in his face with her bleared eyes. 'Come! Begin! I want to be told all about it. What, Rob, boy! You and me can keep a secret together, eh? We've done so before now. Where did they go first, Rob?'

The wretched Grinder made a gasp, and a pause.

'Are you dumb?' said the old woman, angrily.

'Lord, Misses Brown, no! You expect a cove to be a flash of lightning. I wish I was the electric fluency,' muttered the bewildered Grinder. 'I'd have a shock at somebody, that would settle their business.'

'What do you say?' asked the old woman, with a grin.

'I'm wishing my love to you, Misses Brown,' returned the false Rob, seeking consolation in the glass. 'Where did they go to first was it? Him and her, do you mean?'

'Ah!' said the old woman, eagerly. 'Them two.'

'Why, they didn't go nowhere - not together, I mean,' answered Rob.

The old woman looked at him, as though she had a strong impulse upon her to make another clutch at his head and throat, but was restrained by a certain dogged mystery in his face.

'That was the art of it,' said the reluctant Grinder; 'that's the way nobody saw 'em go, or has been able to say how they did go. They went different ways, I tell you Misses Brown.'

'Ay, ay, ay! To meet at an appointed place,' chuckled the old woman, after a moment's silent and keen scrutiny of his face.

'Why, if they weren't a going to meet somewhere, I suppose they might as well have stayed at home, mightn't they, Brown?' returned the unwilling Grinder.

'Well, Rob? Well?' said the old woman, drawing his arm yet tighter through her own, as if, in her eagerness, she were afraid of his slipping away.

'What, haven't we talked enough yet, Misses Brown?' returned the Grinder, who, between his sense of injury, his sense of liquor, and his sense of being on the rack, had become so lachrymose, that at almost every answer he scooped his coats into one or other of his eyes, and uttered an unavailing whine of remonstrance. 'Did she laugh that night, was it? Didn't you ask if she laughed, Misses Brown?'

'Or cried?' added the old woman, nodding assent.

'Neither,' said the Grinder. 'She kept as steady when she and me - oh, I see you will have it out of me, Misses Brown! But take your solemn oath now, that you'll never tell anybody.'

This Mrs Brown very readily did: being naturally Jesuitical; and having no other intention in the matter than that her concealed visitor should hear for himself.

'She kept as steady, then, when she and me went down to Southampton,' said the Grinder, 'as a image. In the morning she was just the same, Misses Brown. And when she went away in the packet before daylight, by herself - me pretending to be her servant, and seeing her safe aboard - she was just the same. Now, are you contented, Misses Brown?'

'No, Rob. Not yet,' answered Mrs Brown, decisively.

'Oh, here's a woman for you!' cried the unfortunate Rob, in an outburst of feeble lamentation over his own helplessness.

'What did you wish to know next, Misses Brown?'

'What became of Master? Where did he go?' she inquired, still holding him tight, and looking close into his face, with her sharp eyes.

'Upon my soul, I don't know, Misses Brown,' answered Rob.

'Upon my soul I don't know what he did, nor where he went, nor anything about him I only know what he said to me as a caution to hold my tongue, when we parted; and I tell you this, Misses Brown, as a friend, that sooner than ever repeat a word of what we're saying now, you had better take and shoot yourself, or shut yourself up in this house, and set it a-fire, for there's nothing he wouldn't do, to be revenged upon you. You don't know him half as well as I do, Misses Brown. You're never safe from him, I tell you.'

'Haven't I taken an oath,' retorted the old woman, 'and won't I keep it?'

'Well, I'm sure I hope you will, Misses Brown,' returned Rob, somewhat doubtfully, and not without a latent threatening in his manner. 'For your own sake, quite as much as mine'

He looked at her as he gave her this friendly caution, and emphasized it with a nodding of his head; but finding it uncomfortable to encounter the yellow face with its grotesque action, and the ferret eyes with their keen old wintry gaze, so close to his own, he looked down uneasily and sat skulking in his chair, as if he were trying to bring himself to a sullen declaration that he would answer no more questions. The old woman, still holding him as before, took this opportunity of raising the forefinger of her right hand, in the air, as a stealthy signal to the concealed observer to give particular attention to what was about to follow.

'Rob,' she said, in her most coaxing tone.

'Good gracious, Misses Brown, what's the matter now?' returned the exasperated Grinder.

'Rob! where did the lady and Master appoint to meet?'

Rob shuffled more and more, and looked up and looked down, and bit his thumb, and dried it on his waistcoat, and finally said, eyeing his tormentor askance, 'How should I know, Misses Brown?'

The old woman held up her finger again, as before, and replying, 'Come, lad! It's no use leading me to that, and there leaving me. I want to know' waited for his answer. Rob, after a discomfited pause, suddenly broke out with, 'How can I pronounce the names of foreign places, Mrs Brown? What an unreasonable woman you are!'

'But you have heard it said, Robby,' she retorted firmly, 'and you know what it sounded like. Come!'

'I never heard it said, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder.

'Then,' retorted the old woman quickly, 'you have seen it written, and you can spell it.'

Rob, with a petulant exclamation between laughing and crying - for he was penetrated with some admiration of Mrs Brown's cunning, even through this persecution - after some reluctant fumbling in his waistcoat pocket, produced from it a little piece of chalk. The old woman's eyes sparkled when she saw it between his thumb and finger, and hastily clearing a space on the deal table, that he might write the word there, she once more made her signal with a shaking hand.

'Now I tell you beforehand what it is, Misses Brown,' said Rob, 'it's no use asking me anything else. I won't answer anything else; I can't. How long it was to be before they met, or whose plan it was that they was to go away alone, I don't know no more than you do. I don't know any more about it. If I was to tell you how I found out this word, you'd believe that. Shall I tell you, Misses Brown?'

'Yes, Rob.'

'Well then, Misses Brown. The way - now you won't ask any more, you know?' said Rob, turning his eyes, which were now fast getting drowsy and stupid, upon her.

'Not another word,' said Mrs Brown.

'Well then, the way was this. When a certain person left the lady with me, he put a piece of paper with a direction written on it in the lady's hand, saying it was in case she should forget. She wasn't afraid of forgetting, for she tore it up as soon as his back was turned, and when I put up the carriage steps, I shook out one of the pieces - she sprinkled the rest out of the window, I suppose, for there was none there afterwards, though I looked for 'em. There was only one word on it, and that was this, if you must and will know. But remember! You're upon your oath, Misses Brown!'

Mrs Brown knew that, she said. Rob, having nothing more to say, began to chalk, slowly and laboriously, on the table.

'D,' the old woman read aloud, when he had formed the letter.

'Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?' he exclaimed, covering it with his hand, and turning impatiently upon her. 'I won't have it read out. Be quiet, will you!'

'Then write large, Rob,' she returned, repeating her secret signal; 'for my eyes are not good, even at print.'

Muttering to himself, and returning to his work with an ill will, Rob went on with the word. As he bent his head down, the person for whose information he so unconsciously laboured, moved from the door behind him to within a short stride of his shoulder, and looked eagerly towards the creeping track of his hand upon the table. At the same time, Alice, from her opposite chair, watched it narrowly as it shaped the letters, and repeated each one on her lips as he made it, without articulating it aloud. At the end of every letter her eyes and Mr Dombey's met, as if each of them sought to be confirmed by the other; and thus they both spelt D.I.J.O.N.

'There!' said the Grinder, moistening the palm of his hand hastily, to obliterate the word; and not content with smearing it out, rubbing and planing all trace of it away with his coat-sleeve, until the very colour of the chalk was gone from the table. 'Now, I hope you're contented, Misses Brown!'

The old woman, in token of her being so, released his arm and patted his back; and the Grinder, overcome with mortification, cross-examination, and liquor, folded his arms on the table, laid his head upon them, and fell asleep.

Not until he had been heavily asleep some time, and was snoring roundly, did the old woman turn towards the door where Mr Dombey stood concealed, and beckon him to come through the room, and pass out. Even then, she hovered over Rob, ready to blind him with her hands, or strike his head down, if he should raise it while the secret step was crossing to the door. But though her glance took sharp cognizance of the sleeper, it was sharp too for the waking man; and when he touched her hand with his, and in spite of all his caution, made a chinking, golden sound, it was as bright and greedy as a raven's.

The daughter's dark gaze followed him to the door, and noted well how pale he was, and how his hurried tread indicated that the least delay was an insupportable restraint upon him, and how he was burning to

be active and away. As he closed the door behind him, she looked round at her mother. The old woman trotted to her; opened her hand to show what was within; and, tightly closing it again in her jealousy and avarice, whispered:

'What will he do, Ally?'

'Mischief,' said the daughter.

'Murder?' asked the old woman.

'He's a madman, in his wounded pride, and may do that, for anything we can say, or he either.'

Her glance was brighter than her mother's, and the fire that shone in it was fiercer; but her face was colourless, even to her lips

They said no more, but sat apart; the mother communing with her money; the daughter with her thoughts; the glance of each, shining in the gloom of the feebly lighted room. Rob slept and snored. The disregarded parrot only was in action. It twisted and pulled at the wires of its cage, with its crooked beak, and crawled up to the dome, and along its roof like a fly, and down again head foremost, and shook, and bit, and rattled at every slender bar, as if it knew its master's danger, and was wild to force a passage out, and fly away to warn him of it.