

Chapter LIII - More Intelligence

There were two of the traitor's own blood - his renounced brother and sister - on whom the weight of his guilt rested almost more heavily, at this time, than on the man whom he had so deeply injured. Prying and tormenting as the world was, it did Mr Dombey the service of nerving him to pursuit and revenge. It roused his passion, stung his pride, twisted the one idea of his life into a new shape, and made some gratification of his wrath, the object into which his whole intellectual existence resolved itself. All the stubbornness and implacability of his nature, all its hard impenetrable quality, all its gloom and moroseness, all its exaggerated sense of personal importance, all its jealous disposition to resent the least flaw in the ample recognition of his importance by others, set this way like many streams united into one, and bore him on upon their tide. The most impetuously passionate and violently impulsive of mankind would have been a milder enemy to encounter than the sullen Mr Dombey wrought to this. A wild beast would have been easier turned or soothed than the grave gentleman without a wrinkle in his starched cravat.

But the very intensity of his purpose became almost a substitute for action in it. While he was yet uninformed of the traitor's retreat, it served to divert his mind from his own calamity, and to entertain it with another prospect. The brother and sister of his false favourite had no such relief; everything in their history, past and present, gave his delinquency a more afflicting meaning to them.

The sister may have sometimes sadly thought that if she had remained with him, the companion and friend she had been once, he might have escaped the crime into which he had fallen. If she ever thought so, it was still without regret for what she had done, without the least doubt of her duty, without any pricing or enhancing of her self-devotion. But when this possibility presented itself to the erring and repentant brother, as it sometimes did, it smote upon his heart with such a keen, reproachful touch as he could hardly bear. No idea of retort upon his cruel brother came into his mind. New accusation of himself, fresh inward lamentings over his own unworthiness, and the ruin in which it was at once his consolation and his self-reproach that he did not stand alone, were the sole kind of reflections to which the discovery gave rise in him.

It was on the very same day whose evening set upon the last chapter, and when Mr Dombey's world was busiest with the elopement of his wife, that the window of the room in which the brother and sister sat at their early breakfast, was darkened by the unexpected shadow of a man coming to the little porch: which man was Perch the Messenger.

'I've stepped over from Balls Pond at a early hour,' said Mr Perch, confidentially looking in at the room door, and stopping on the mat to wipe his shoes all round, which had no mud upon them, 'agreeable to my instructions last night. They was, to be sure and bring a note to you, Mr Carker, before you went out in the morning. I should have been here a good hour and a half ago,' said Mr Perch, meekly, 'but fOr the state of health of Mrs P., who I thought I should have lost in the night, I do assure you, five distinct times.'

'Is your wife so ill?' asked Harriet.

'Why, you see,' said Mr Perch, first turning round to shut the door carefully, 'she takes what has happened in our House so much to heart, Miss. Her nerves is so very delicate, you see, and soon unstrung. Not but what the strongest nerves had good need to be shook, I'm sure. You feel it very much yourself, no doubts.

Harriet repressed a sigh, and glanced at her brother.

'I'm sure I feel it myself, in my humble way,' Mr Perch went on to say, with a shake of his head, 'in a manner I couldn't have believed if I hadn't been called upon to undergo. It has almost the effect of drink upon me. I literally feels every morning as if I had been taking more than was good for me over-night.'

Mr Perch's appearance corroborated this recital of his symptoms. There was an air of feverish lassitude about it, that seemed referable to drams; and, which, in fact, might no doubt have been traced to those numerous discoveries of himself in the bars of public-houses, being treated and questioned, which he was in the daily habit of making.

'Therefore I can judge,' said Mr Perch, shaking his head and speaking in a silvery murmur, 'of the feelings of such as is at all peculiarly sitiwated in this most painful rewelation.'

Here Mr Perch waited to be confided in; and receiving no confidence, coughed behind his hand. This leading to nothing, he coughed behind his hat; and that leading to nothing, he put his hat on the ground and sought in his breast pocket for the letter.

'If I rightly recollect, there was no answer,' said Mr Perch, with an affable smile; 'but perhaps you'll be so good as cast your eye over it, Sir.'

John Carker broke the seal, which was Mr Dombey's, and possessing himself of the contents, which were very brief, replied,

'No. No answer is expected.'

'Then I shall wish you good morning, Miss,' said Perch, taking a step toward the door, and hoping, I'm sure, that you'll not permit yourself to be more reduced in mind than you can help, by the late painful revelation. The Papers,' said Mr Perch, taking two steps back again, and comprehensively addressing both the brother and sister in a whisper of increased mystery, 'is more eager for news of it than you'd suppose possible. One of the Sunday ones, in a blue cloak and a white hat, that had previously offered for to bribe me - need I say with what success? - was dodging about our court last night as late as twenty minutes after eight o'clock. I see him myself, with his eye at the counting-house keyhole, which being patent is impervious. Another one,' said Mr Perch, 'with military frogs, is in the parlour of the King's Arms all the blessed day. I happened, last week, to let a little observation fall there, and next morning, which was Sunday, I see it worked up in print, in a most surprising manner.'

Mr Perch resorted to his breast pocket, as if to produce the paragraph but receiving no encouragement, pulled out his beaver gloves, picked up his hat, and took his leave; and before it was high noon, Mr Perch had related to several select audiences at the King's Arms and elsewhere, how Miss Carker, bursting into tears, had caught him by both hands, and said, 'Oh! dear dear Perch, the sight of you is all the comfort I have left!' and how Mr John Carker had said, in an awful voice, 'Perch, I disown him. Never let me hear him mentioned as a brother more!'

'Dear John,' said Harriet, when they were left alone, and had remained silent for some few moments. 'There are bad tidings in that letter.'

'Yes. But nothing unexpected,' he replied. 'I saw the writer yesterday.'

'The writer?'

'Mr Dombey. He passed twice through the Counting House while I was there. I had been able to avoid him before, but of course could not hope to do that long. I know how natural it was that he should regard my presence as something offensive; I felt it must be so, myself.'

'He did not say so?'

'No; he said nothing: but I saw that his glance rested on me for a moment, and I was prepared for what would happen - for what has happened. I am dismissed!'

She looked as little shocked and as hopeful as she could, but it was distressing news, for many reasons.

'I need not tell you" said John Carker, reading the letter, 'why your name would henceforth have an unnatural sound, in however remote a connexion with mine, or why the daily sight of anyone who bears it, would be unendurable to me. I have to notify the cessation of all engagements between us, from this date, and to request that no renewal of any communication with me, or my establishment, be ever attempted by you.' - Enclosed is an equivalent in money to a generously long notice, and this is my discharge.' Heaven knows, Harriet, it is a lenient and considerate one, when we remember all!

'If it be lenient and considerate to punish you at all, John, for the misdeed of another,' she replied gently, 'yes.'

'We have been an ill-omened race to him,' said John Carker. 'He has reason to shrink from the sound of our name, and to think that there is something cursed and wicked in our blood. I should almost think it too, Harriet, but for you.'

'Brother, don't speak like this. If you have any special reason, as you say you have, and think you have - though I say, No!- to love me, spare me the hearing of such wild mad words!'

He covered his face with both his hands; but soon permitted her, coming near him, to take one in her own.

'After so many years, this parting is a melancholy thing, I know,' said his sister, 'and the cause of it is dreadful to us both. We have to live, too, and must look about us for the means. Well, well! We can do so, undismayed. It is our pride, not our trouble, to strive, John, and to strive together!'

A smile played on her lips, as she kissed his cheek, and entreated him to be of good cheer.

'Oh, dearest sister! Tied, of your own noble will, to a ruined man! whose reputation is blighted; who has no friend himself, and has driven every friend of yours away!'

'John!' she laid her hand hastily upon his lips, 'for my sake! In remembrance of our long companionship!' He was silent 'Now, let me tell you, dear,' quietly sitting by his side, 'I have, as you have, expected this; and when I have been thinking of it, and fearing that it would happen, and preparing myself for it, as well as I could, I have resolved to tell you, if it should be so, that I have kept a secret from you, and that we have a friend.'

'What's our friend's name, Harriet?' he answered with a sorrowful smile.

'Indeed, I don't know, but he once made a very earnest protestation to me of his friendship and his wish to serve us: and to this day I believe 'him.'

'Harriet!' exclaimed her wondering brother, 'where does this friend live?'

'Neither do I know that,' she returned. 'But he knows us both, and our history - all our little history, John. That is the reason why, at his own suggestion, I have kept the secret of his coming, here, from you, lest his acquaintance with it should distress you.'

'Here! Has he been here, Harriet?'

'Here, in this room. Once.'

'What kind of man?'

'Not young. 'Grey-headed,' as he said, 'and fast growing greyer.' But generous, and frank, and good, I am sure.'

'And only seen once, Harriet?'

'In this room only once,' said his sister, with the slightest and most transient glow upon her cheek; 'but when here, he entreated me to suffer him to see me once a week as he passed by, in token of our being well, and continuing to need nothing at his hands. For I told him, when he proffered us any service he could render - which was the object of his visit - that we needed nothing.'

'And once a week - '

'Once every week since then, and always on the same day, and at the same hour, he his gone past; always on foot; always going in the same direction - towards London; and never pausing longer than to bow to me, and wave his hand cheerfully, as a kind guardian might. He made that promise when he proposed these curious interviews, and has kept it so faithfully and pleasantly, that if I ever felt any trifling uneasiness about them in the beginning (which I don't think I did, John; his manner was so plain and true) It very soon vanished, and left me quite glad when the day was coming. Last Monday - the first since this terrible event - he did not go by; and I have wondered

whether his absence can have been in any way connected with what has happened.'

'How?' inquired her brother.

'I don't know how. I have only speculated on the coincidence; I have not tried to account for it. I feel sure he will return. When he does, dear John, let me tell him that I have at last spoken to you, and let me bring you together. He will certainly help us to a new livelihood. His entreaty was that he might do something to smooth my life and yours; and I gave him my promise that if we ever wanted a friend, I would remember him.'

'Then his name was to be no secret, 'Harriet,' said her brother, who had listened with close attention, 'describe this gentleman to me. I surely ought to know one who knows me so well.'

His sister painted, as vividly as she could, the features, stature, and dress of her visitor; but John Carker, either from having no knowledge of the original, or from some fault in her description, or from some abstraction of his thoughts as he walked to and fro, pondering, could not recognise the portrait she presented to him.

However, it was agreed between them that he should see the original when he next appeared. This concluded, the sister applied herself, with a less anxious breast, to her domestic occupations; and the grey-haired man, late Junior of Dombey's, devoted the first day of his unwonted liberty to working in the garden.

It was quite late at night, and the brother was reading aloud while the sister plied her needle, when they were interrupted by a knocking at the door. In the atmosphere of vague anxiety and dread that lowered about them in connexion with their fugitive brother, this sound, unusual there, became almost alarming. The brother going to the door, the sister sat and listened timidly. Someone spoke to him, and he replied and seemed surprised; and after a few words, the two approached together.

'Harriet,' said her brother, lighting in their late visitor, and speaking in a low voice, 'Mr Morfin - the gentleman so long in Dombey's House with James.'

His sister started back, as if a ghost had entered. In the doorway stood the unknown friend, with the dark hair sprinkled with grey, the ruddy face, the broad clear brow, and hazel eyes, whose secret she had kept so long!

'John!' she said, half-breathless. 'It is the gentleman I told you of, today!'

'The gentleman, Miss Harriet,' said the visitor, coming in - for he had stopped a moment in the doorway - 'is greatly relieved to hear you say that: he has been devising ways and means, all the way here, of explaining himself, and has been satisfied with none. Mr John, I am not quite a stranger here. You were stricken with astonishment when you saw me at your door just now. I observe you are more astonished at present. Well! That's reasonable enough under existing circumstances. If we were not such creatures of habit as we are, we shouldn't have reason to be astonished half so often.'

By this time, he had greeted Harriet with that able mingling of cordiality and respect which she recollected so well, and had sat down near her, pulled off his gloves, and thrown them into his hat upon the table.

'There's nothing astonishing,' he said, 'in my having conceived a desire to see your sister, Mr John, or in my having gratified it in my own way. As to the regularity of my visits since (which she may have mentioned to you), there is nothing extraordinary in that. They soon grew into a habit; and we are creatures of habit - creatures of habit!'

Putting his hands into his pockets, and leaning back in his chair, he looked at the brother and sister as if it were interesting to him to see them together; and went on to say, with a kind of irritable thoughtfulness:

'It's this same habit that confirms some of us, who are capable of better things, in Lucifer's own pride and stubbornness - that confirms and deepens others of us in villainy - more of us in indifference - that hardens us from day to day, according to the temper of our clay, like images, and leaves us as susceptible as images to new impressions and convictions. You shall judge of its influence on me, John. For more years than I need name, I had my small, and exactly defined share, in the management of Dombey's House, and saw your brother (who has proved himself a scoundrel! Your sister will forgive my being obliged to mention it) extending and extending his influence, until the business and its owner were his football; and saw you toiling at your obscure desk every day; and was quite content to be as little troubled as I might be, out of my own strip of duty, and to let everything about me go on, day by day, unquestioned, like a great machine - that was its habit and mine - and to take it all for granted, and consider it all right. My Wednesday nights came regularly round, our quartette parties came regularly off, my violoncello was in good tune, and there was nothing wrong in my world - or if anything not much - or little or much, it was no affair of mine.'

'I can answer for your being more respected and beloved during all that time than anybody in the House, Sir,' said John Carker.

'Pooh! Good-natured and easy enough, I daresay,' returned the other, 'a habit I had. It suited the Manager; it suited the man he managed: it suited me best of all. I did what was allotted to me to do, made no court to either of them, and was glad to occupy a station in which none was required. So I should have gone on till now, but that my room had a thin wall. You can tell your sister that it was divided from the Manager's room by a wainscot partition.'

'They were adjoining rooms; had been one, Perhaps, originally; and were separated, as Mr Morfin says,' said her brother, looking back to him for the resumption of his explanation.

'I have whistled, hummed tunes, gone accurately through the whole of Beethoven's Sonata in B,' to let him know that I was within hearing,' said Mr Morfin; 'but he never heeded me. It happened seldom enough that I was within hearing of anything of a private nature, certainly. But when I was, and couldn't otherwise avoid knowing something of it, I walked out. I walked out once, John, during a conversation between two brothers, to which, in the beginning, young Walter Gay was a party. But I overheard some of it before I left the room. You remember it sufficiently, perhaps, to tell your sister what its nature was?'

'It referred, Harriet,' said her brother in a low voice, 'to the past, and to our relative positions in the House.'

'Its matter was not new to me, but was presented in a new aspect. It shook me in my habit - the habit of nine-tenths of the world - of believing that all was right about me, because I was used to it,' said their visitor; 'and induced me to recall the history of the two brothers, and to ponder on it. I think it was almost the first time in my life when I fell into this train of reflection - how will many things that are familiar, and quite matters of course to us now, look, when we come to see them from that new and distant point of view which we must all take up, one day or other? I was something less good-natured, as the phrase goes, after that morning, less easy and complacent altogether.'

He sat for a minute or so, drumming with one hand on the table; and resumed in a hurry, as if he were anxious to get rid of his confession.

'Before I knew what to do, or whether I could do anything, there was a second conversation between the same two brothers, in which their sister was mentioned. I had no scruples of conscience in suffering all the waifs and strays of that conversation to float to me as freely as they would. I considered them mine by right. After that, I came here to

see the sister for myself. The first time I stopped at the garden gate, I made a pretext of inquiring into the character of a poor neighbour; but I wandered out of that tract, and I think Miss Harriet mistrusted me. The second time I asked leave to come in; came in; and said what I wished to say. Your sister showed me reasons which I dared not dispute, for receiving no assistance from me then; but I established a means of communication between us, which remained unbroken until within these few days, when I was prevented, by important matters that have lately devolved upon me, from maintaining them'

'How little I have suspected this,' said John Carker, 'when I have seen you every day, Sir! If Harriet could have guessed your name - '

'Why, to tell you the truth, John,' interposed the visitor, 'I kept it to myself for two reasons. I don't know that the first might have been binding alone; but one has no business to take credit for good intentions, and I made up my mind, at all events, not to disclose myself until I should be able to do you some real service or other. My second reason was, that I always hoped there might be some lingering possibility of your brother's relenting towards you both; and in that case, I felt that where there was the chance of a man of his suspicious, watchful character, discovering that you had been secretly befriended by me, there was the chance of a new and fatal cause of division. I resolved, to be sure, at the risk of turning his displeasure against myself - which would have been no matter - to watch my opportunity of serving you with the head of the House; but the distractions of death, courtship, marriage, and domestic unhappiness, have left us no head but your brother for this long, long time. And it would have been better for us,' said the visitor, dropping his voice, 'to have been a lifeless trunk.'

He seemed conscious that these latter words had escaped him against his will, and stretching out a hand to the brother, and a hand to the sister, continued: 'All I could desire to say, and more, I have now said. All I mean goes beyond words, as I hope you understand and believe. The time has come, John - though most unfortunately and unhappily come - when I may help you without interfering with that redeeming struggle, which has lasted through so many years; since you were discharged from it today by no act of your own. It is late; I need say no more to-night. You will guard the treasure you have here, without advice or reminder from me.'

With these words he rose to go.

'But go you first, John,' he said goodhumouredly, 'with a light, without saying what you want to say, whatever that maybe;' John Carker's heart was full, and he would have relieved it in speech, if he could; 'and let me have a word with your sister. We have talked alone

before, and in this room too; though it looks more natural with you here.'

Following him out with his eyes, he turned kindly to Harriet, and said in a lower voice, and with an altered and graver manner:

'You wish to ask me something of the man whose sister it is your misfortune to be.'

'I dread to ask,' said Harriet.

'You have looked so earnestly at me more than once,' rejoined the visitor, 'that I think I can divine your question. Has he taken money? Is it that?'

'Yes.'

'He has not.'

'I thank Heaven!' said Harriet. 'For the sake of John.'

'That he has abused his trust in many ways,' said Mr Morfin; 'that he has oftener dealt and speculated to advantage for himself, than for the House he represented; that he has led the House on, to prodigious ventures, often resulting in enormous losses; that he has always pampered the vanity and ambition of his employer, when it was his duty to have held them in check, and shown, as it was in his power to do, to what they tended here or there; will not, perhaps, surprise you now. Undertakings have been entered on, to swell the reputation of the House for vast resources, and to exhibit it in magnificent contrast to other merchants' Houses, of which it requires a steady head to contemplate the possibly - a few disastrous changes of affairs might render them the probably - ruinous consequences. In the midst of the many transactions of the House, in most parts of the world: a great labyrinth of which only he has held the clue: he has had the opportunity, and he seems to have used it, of keeping the various results afloat, when ascertained, and substituting estimates and generalities for facts. But latterly - you follow me, Miss Harriet?'

'Perfectly, perfectly,' she answered, with her frightened face fixed on his. 'Pray tell me all the worst at once.'

'Latterly, he appears to have devoted the greatest pains to making these results so plain and clear, that reference to the private books enables one to grasp them, numerous and varying as they are, with extraordinary ease. As if he had resolved to show his employer at one broad view what has been brought upon him by ministration to his ruling passion! That it has been his constant practice to minister to

that passion basely, and to flatter it corruptly, is indubitable. In that, his criminality, as it is connected with the affairs of the House, chiefly consists.'

'One other word before you leave me, dear Sir,' said Harriet. 'There is no danger in all this?'

'How danger?' he returned, with a little hesitation.

'To the credit of the House?'

'I cannot help answering you plainly, and trusting you completely,' said Mr Morfin, after a moment's survey of her face.

'You may. Indeed you may!'

'I am sure I may. Danger to the House's credit? No; none There may be difficulty, greater or less difficulty, but no danger, unless - unless, indeed - the head of the House, unable to bring his mind to the reduction of its enterprises, and positively refusing to believe that it is, or can be, in any position but the position in which he has always represented it to himself, should urge it beyond its strength. Then it would totter.'

'But there is no apprehension of that?' said Harriet.

'There shall be no half-confidence,' he replied, shaking her hand, 'between us. Mr Dombey is unapproachable by anyone, and his state of mind is haughty, rash, unreasonable, and ungovernable, now. But he is disturbed and agitated now beyond all common bounds, and it may pass. You now know all, both worst and best. No more to-night, and good-night!'

With that he kissed her hand, and, passing out to the door where her brother stood awaiting his coming, put him cheerfully aside when he essayed to speak; told him that, as they would see each other soon and often, he might speak at another time, if he would, but there was no leisure for it then; and went away at a round pace, in order that no word of gratitude might follow him.

The brother and sister sat conversing by the fireside, until it was almost day; made sleepless by this glimpse of the new world that opened before them, and feeling like two people shipwrecked long ago, upon a solitary coast, to whom a ship had come at last, when they were old in resignation, and had lost all thought of any other home. But another and different kind of disquietude kept them waking too. The darkness out of which this light had broken on them gathered

around; and the shadow of their guilty brother was in the house where his foot had never trod.

Nor was it to be driven out, nor did it fade before the sun. Next morning it was there; at noon; at night Darkest and most distinct at night, as is now to be told.

John Carker had gone out, in pursuance of a letter of appointment from their friend, and Harriet was left in the house alone. She had been alone some hours. A dull, grave evening, and a deepening twilight, were not favourable to the removal of the oppression on her spirits. The idea of this brother, long unseen and unknown, flitted about her in frightful shapes. He was dead, dying, calling to her, staring at her, frowning on her. The pictures in her mind were so obtrusive and exact that, as the twilight deepened, she dreaded to raise her head and look at the dark corners of the room, lest his wraith, the offspring of her excited imagination, should be waiting there, to startle her. Once she had such a fancy of his being in the next room, hiding - though she knew quite well what a distempered fancy it was, and had no belief in it - that she forced herself to go there, for her own conviction. But in vain. The room resumed its shadowy terrors, the moment she left it; and she had no more power to divest herself of these vague impressions of dread, than if they had been stone giants, rooted in the solid earth.

It was almost dark, and she was sitting near the window, with her head upon her hand, looking down, when, sensible of a sudden increase in the gloom of the apartment, she raised her eyes, and uttered an involuntary cry. Close to the glass, a pale scared face gazed in; vacantly, for an instant, as searching for an object; then the eyes rested on herself, and lighted up.

'Let me in! Let me in! I want to speak to you!' and the hand rattled on the glass.

She recognised immediately the woman with the long dark hair, to whom she had given warmth, food, and shelter, one wet night. Naturally afraid of her, remembering her violent behaviour, Harriet, retreating a little from the window, stood undecided and alarmed.

'Let me in! Let me speak to you! I am thankful - quiet - humble - anything you like. But let me speak to you.'

The vehement manner of the entreaty, the earnest expression of the face, the trembling of the two hands that were raised imploringly, a certain dread and terror in the voice akin to her own condition at the moment, prevailed with Harriet. She hastened to the door and opened it.

'May I come in, or shall I speak here?' said the woman, catching at her hand.

'What is it that you want? What is it that you have to say?'

'Not much, but let me say it out, or I shall never say it. I am tempted now to go away. There seem to be hands dragging me from the door. Let me come in, if you can trust me for this once!'

Her energy again prevailed, and they passed into the firelight of the little kitchen, where she had before sat, and ate, and dried her clothes.

'Sit there,' said Alice, kneeling down beside her, 'and look at me. You remember me?'

'I do.'

'You remember what I told you I had been, and where I came from, ragged and lame, with the fierce wind and weather beating on my head?'

'Yes.'

'You know how I came back that night, and threw your money in the dirt, and you and your race. Now, see me here, upon my knees. Am I less earnest now, than I was then?'

'If what you ask,' said Harriet, gently, 'is forgiveness - '

'But it's not!' returned the other, with a proud, fierce look 'What I ask is to be believed. Now you shall judge if I am worthy of belief, both as I was, and as I am.'

Still upon her knees, and with her eyes upon the fire, and the fire shining on her ruined beauty and her wild black hair, one long tress of which she pulled over her shoulder, and wound about her hand, and thoughtfully bit and tore while speaking, she went on:

'When I was young and pretty, and this,' plucking contemptuously at the hair she held, was only handled delicately, and couldn't be admired enough, my mother, who had not been very mindful of me as a child, found out my merits, and was fond of me, and proud of me. She was covetous and poor, and thought to make a sort of property of me. No great lady ever thought that of a daughter yet, I'm sure, or acted as if she did - it's never done, we all know - and that shows that the only instances of mothers bringing up their daughters wrong, and evil coming of it, are among such miserable folks as us.'

Looking at the fire, as if she were forgetful, for the moment, of having any auditor, she continued in a dreamy way, as she wound the long tress of hair tight round and round her hand.

'What came of that, I needn't say. Wretched marriages don't come of such things, in our degree; only wretchedness and ruin. Wretchedness and ruin came on me - came on me.'

Raising her eyes swiftly from their moody gaze upon the fire, to Harriet's face, she said:

'I am wasting time, and there is none to spare; yet if I hadn't thought of all, I shouldn't be here now. Wretchedness and ruin came on me, I say. I was made a short-lived toy, and flung aside more cruelly and carelessly than even such things are. By whose hand do you think?'

'Why do you ask me?' said Harriet.

'Why do you tremble?' rejoined Alice, with an eager look. 'His usage made a Devil of me. I sunk in wretchedness and ruin, lower and lower yet. I was concerned in a robbery - in every part of it but the gains - and was found out, and sent to be tried, without a friend, without a penny. Though I was but a girl, I would have gone to Death, sooner than ask him for a word, if a word of his could have saved me. I would! To any death that could have been invented. But my mother, covetous always, sent to him in my name, told the true story of my case, and humbly prayed and petitioned for a small last gift - for not so many pounds as I have fingers on this hand. Who was it, do you think, who snapped his fingers at me in my misery, lying, as he believed, at his feet, and left me without even this poor sign of remembrance; well satisfied that I should be sent abroad, beyond the reach of farther trouble to him, and should die, and rot there? Who was this, do you think?'

'Why do you ask me?' repeated Harriet.

'Why do you tremble?' said Alice, laying her hand upon her arm' and looking in her face, 'but that the answer is on your lips! It was your brother James.'

Harriet trembled more and more, but did not avert her eyes from the eager look that rested on them.

'When I knew you were his sister - which was on that night - I came back, weary and lame, to spurn your gift. I felt that night as if I could have travelled, weary and lame, over the whole world, to stab him, if I could have found him in a lonely place with no one near. Do you believe that I was earnest in all that?'

'I do! Good Heaven, why are you come again?'

'Since then,' said Alice, with the same grasp of her arm, and the same look in her face, 'I have seen him! I have followed him with my eyes, in the broad day. If any spark of my resentment slumbered in my bosom, it sprung into a blaze when my eyes rested on him. You know he has wronged a proud man, and made him his deadly enemy. What if I had given information of him to that man?'

'Information!' repeated Harriet.

'What if I had found out one who knew your brother's secret; who knew the manner of his flight, who knew where he and the companion of his flight were gone? What if I had made him utter all his knowledge, word by word, before his enemy, concealed to hear it? What if I had sat by at the time, looking into this enemy's face, and seeing it change till it was scarcely human? What if I had seen him rush away, mad, in pursuit? What if I knew, now, that he was on his road, more fiend than man, and must, in so many hours, come up with him?'

'Remove your hand!' said Harriet, recoiling. 'Go away! Your touch is dreadful to me!' 'I have done this,' pursued the other, with her eager look, regardless of the interruption. 'Do I speak and look as if I really had? Do you believe what I am saying?'

'I fear I must. Let my arm go!'

'Not yet. A moment more. You can think what my revengeful purpose must have been, to last so long, and urge me to do this?'

'Dreadful!' said Harriet.

'Then when you see me now,' said Alice hoarsely, 'here again, kneeling quietly on the ground, with my touch upon your arm, with my eyes upon your face, you may believe that there is no common earnestness in what I say, and that no common struggle has been battling in my breast. I am ashamed to speak the words, but I relent. I despise myself; I have fought with myself all day, and all last night; but I relent towards him without reason, and wish to repair what I have done, if it is possible. I wouldn't have them come together while his pursuer is so blind and headlong. If you had seen him as he went out last night, you would know the danger better.'

'How can it be prevented? What can I do?' cried Harriet.

'All night long,' pursued the other, hurriedly, 'I had dreams of him - and yet I didn't sleep - in his blood. All day, I have had him near me.'

'What can I do?' cried Harriet, shuddering at these words.

'If there is anyone who'll write, or send, or go to him, let them lose no time. He is at Dijon. Do you know the name, and where it is?'

'Yes.'

'Warn him that the man he has made his enemy is in a frenzy, and that he doesn't know him if he makes light of his approach. Tell him that he is on the road - I know he is! - and hurrying on. Urge him to get away while there is time - if there is time - and not to meet him yet. A month or so will make years of difference. Let them not encounter, through me. Anywhere but there! Any time but now! Let his foe follow him, and find him for himself, but not through me! There is enough upon my head without.'

The fire ceased to be reflected in her jet black hair, uplifted face, and eager eyes; her hand was gone from Harriet's arm; and the place where she had been was empty.