

Chapter LVI - Several People Delighted, And The Game Chicken Disgusted

The Midshipman was all alive. Mr Toots and Susan had arrived at last. Susan had run upstairs like a young woman bereft of her senses, and Mr Toots and the Chicken had gone into the Parlour.

'Oh my own pretty darling sweet Miss Floy!' cried the Nipper, running into Florence's room, 'to think that it should come to this and I should find you here my own dear dove with nobody to wait upon you and no home to call your own but never never will I go away again Miss Floy for though I may not gather moss I'm not a rolling stone nor is my heart a stone or else it wouldn't bust as it is busting now oh dear oh dear!'

Pouring out these words, without the faintest indication of a stop, of any sort, Miss Nipper, on her knees beside her mistress, hugged her close.

'Oh love!' cried Susan, 'I know all that's past I know it all my tender pet and I'm a choking give me air!'

'Susan, dear good Susan!' said Florence. 'Oh bless her! I that was her little maid when she was a little child! and is she really, really truly going to be married?' exclaimed Susan, in a burst of pain and pleasure, pride and grief, and Heaven knows how many other conflicting feelings.

'Who told you so?' said Florence.

'Oh gracious me! that innocentest creetur Toots,' returned Susan hysterically. 'I knew he must be right my dear, because he took on so. He's the devotedest and innocentest infant! And is my darling,' pursued Susan, with another close embrace and burst of tears, 'really really going to be married!'

The mixture of compassion, pleasure, tenderness, protection, and regret with which the Nipper constantly recurred to this subject, and at every such once, raised her head to look in the young face and kiss it, and then laid her head again upon her mistress's shoulder, caressing her and sobbing, was as womanly and good a thing, in its way, as ever was seen in the world.

'There, there!' said the soothing voice of Florence presently. 'Now you're quite yourself, dear Susan!'

Miss Nipper, sitting down upon the floor, at her mistress's feet, laughing and sobbing, holding her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes

with one hand, and patting Diogenes with the other as he licked her face, confessed to being more composed, and laughed and cried a little more in proof of it.

'I-I-I never did see such a creetur as that Toots,' said Susan, 'in all my born days never!'

'So kind,' suggested Florence.

'And so comic!' Susan sobbed. 'The way he's been going on inside with me with that disrespectable Chicken on the box!'

'About what, Susan?' inquired Florence, timidly.

'Oh about Lieutenant Walters, and Captain Gills, and you my dear Miss Floy, and the silent tomb,' said Susan.

'The silent tomb!' repeated Florence.

'He says,' here Susan burst into a violent hysterical laugh, 'that he'll go down into it now immediately and quite comfortable, but bless your heart my dear Miss Floy he won't, he's a great deal too happy in seeing other people happy for that, he may not be a Solomon,' pursued the Nipper, with her usual volubility, 'nor do I say he is but this I do say a less selfish human creature human nature never knew!' Miss Nipper being still hysterical, laughed immoderately after making this energetic declaration, and then informed Florence that he was waiting below to see her; which would be a rich repayment for the trouble he had had in his late expedition.

Florence entreated Susan to beg of Mr Toots as a favour that she might have the pleasure of thanking him for his kindness; and Susan, in a few moments, produced that young gentleman, still very much dishevelled in appearance, and stammering exceedingly.

'Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots. 'To be again permitted to - to - gaze - at least, not to gaze, but - I don't exactly know what I was going to say, but it's of no consequence.

'I have to thank you so often,' returned Florence, giving him both her hands, with all her innocent gratitude beaming in her face, 'that I have no words left, and don't know how to do it.'

'Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, in an awful voice, 'if it was possible that you could, consistently with your angelic nature, Curse me, you would - if I may be allowed to say so - floor me infinitely less, than by these undeserved expressions of kindness Their effect upon me - is - but,'

said Mr Toots, abruptly, 'this is a digression, and of no consequence at all.'

As there seemed to be no means of replying to this, but by thanking him again, Florence thanked him again.

'I could wish,' said Mr Toots, 'to take this opportunity, Miss Dombey, if I might, of entering into a word of explanation. I should have had the pleasure of - of returning with Susan at an earlier period; but, in the first place, we didn't know the name of the relation to whose house she had gone, and, in the second, as she had left that relation's and gone to another at a distance, I think that scarcely anything short of the sagacity of the Chicken, would have found her out in the time.'

Florence was sure of it.

'This, however,' said Mr Toots, 'is not the point. The company of Susan has been, I assure you, Miss Dombey, a consolation and satisfaction to me, in my state of mind, more easily conceived than described. The journey has been its own reward. That, however, still, is not the point. Miss Dombey, I have before observed that I know I am not what is considered a quick person. I am perfectly aware of that. I don't think anybody could be better acquainted with his own - if it was not too strong an expression, I should say with the thickness of his own head - than myself. But, Miss Dombey, I do, notwithstanding, perceive the state of - of things - with Lieutenant Walters. Whatever agony that state of things may have caused me (which is of no consequence at all), I am bound to say, that Lieutenant Walters is a person who appears to be worthy of the blessing that has fallen on his - on his brow. May he wear it long, and appreciate it, as a very different, and very unworthy individual, that it is of no consequence to name, would have done! That, however, still, is not the point. Miss Dombey, Captain Gills is a friend of mine; and during the interval that is now elapsing, I believe it would afford Captain Gills pleasure to see me occasionally coming backwards and forwards here. It would afford me pleasure so to come. But I cannot forget that I once committed myself, fatally, at the corner of the Square at Brighton; and if my presence will be, in the least degree, unpleasant to you, I only ask you to name it to me now, and assure you that I shall perfectly understand you. I shall not consider it at all unkind, and shall only be too delighted and happy to be honoured with your confidence.'

'Mr Toots,' returned Florence, 'if you, who are so old and true a friend of mine, were to stay away from this house now, you would make me very unhappy. It can never, never, give me any feeling but pleasure to see you.'

'Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, 'if I shed a tear, it is a tear of joy. It is of no consequence, and I am very much obliged to you. I may be allowed to remark, after what you have so kindly said, that it is not my intention to neglect my person any longer.'

Florence received this intimation with the prettiest expression of perplexity possible.

'I mean,' said Mr Toots, 'that I shall consider it my duty as a fellow-creature generally, until I am claimed by the silent tomb, to make the best of myself, and to - to have my boots as brightly polished, as - as - circumstances will admit of. This is the last time, Miss Dombey, of my intruding any observation of a private and personal nature. I thank you very much indeed. if I am not, in a general way, as sensible as my friends could wish me to be, or as I could wish myself, I really am, upon my word and honour, particularly sensible of what is considerate and kind. I feel,' said Mr Toots, in an impassioned tone, 'as if I could express my feelings, at the present moment, in a most remarkable manner, if - if - I could only get a start.'

Appearing not to get it, after waiting a minute or two to see if it would come, Mr Toots took a hasty leave, and went below to seek the Captain, whom he found in the shop.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'what is now to take place between us, takes place under the sacred seal of confidence. It is the sequel, Captain Gills, of what has taken place between myself and Miss Dombey, upstairs.'

'Aloft and aloft, eh, my lad?' murmured the Captain.

'Exactly so, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, whose fervour of acquiescence was greatly heightened by his entire ignorance of the Captain's meaning. 'Miss Dombey, I believe, Captain Gills, is to be shortly united to Lieutenant Walters?'

'Why, ay, my lad. We're all shipmets here, - Wal'r and sweet-heart will be jined together in the house of bondage, as soon as the askings is over,' whispered Captain Cuttle, in his ear.

'The askings, Captain Gills!' repeated Mr Toots.

'In the church, down yonder,' said the Captain, pointing his thumb over his shoulder.

'Oh! Yes!' returned Mr Toots.

'And then,' said the Captain, in his hoarse whisper, and tapping Mr Toots on the chest with the back of his hand, and falling from him with a look of infinite admiration, 'what follers? That there pretty creetur, as delicately brought up as a foreign bird, goes away upon the roaring main with Wal'r on a woyage to China!'

'Lord, Captain Gills!' said Mr Toots.

'Ay!' nodded the Captain. 'The ship as took him up, when he was wrecked in the hurricane that had drove her clean out of her course, was a China trader, and Wal'r made the woyage, and got into favour, aboard and ashore - being as smart and good a lad as ever stepped - and so, the supercargo dying at Canton, he got made (having acted as clerk afore), and now he's supercargo aboard another ship, same owners. And so, you see,' repeated the Captain, thoughtfully, 'the pretty creetur goes away upon the roaring main with Wal'r, on a woyage to China.'

Mr Toots and Captain Cuttle heaved a sigh in concert. 'What then?' said the Captain. 'She loves him true. He loves her true. Them as should have loved and tended of her, treated of her like the beasts as perish. When she, cast out of home, come here to me, and dropped upon them planks, her wounded heart was broke. I know it. I, Ed'ard Cuttle, see it. There's nowt but true, kind, steady love, as can ever piece it up again. If so be I didn't know that, and didn't know as Wal'r was her true love, brother, and she his, I'd have these here blue arms and legs chopped off, afore I'd let her go. But I know it, and what then! Why, then, I say, Heaven go with 'em both, and so it will! Amen!'

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'let me have the pleasure of shaking hands You've a way of saying things, that gives me an agreeable warmth, all up my back. I say Amen. You are aware, Captain Gills, that I, too, have adored Miss Dombey.'

'Cheer up!' said the Captain, laying his hand on Mr Toots's shoulder. 'Stand by, boy!'

'It is my intention, Captain Gills,' returned the spirited Mr Toots, 'to cheer up. Also to standby, as much as possible. When the silent tomb shall yawn, Captain Gills, I shall be ready for burial; not before. But not being certain, just at present, of my power over myself, what I wish to say to you, and what I shall take it as a particular favour if you will mention to Lieutenant Walters, is as follows.'

'Is as follers,' echoed the Captain. 'Steady!'

'Miss Dombey being so inexpressably kind,' continued Mr Toots with watery eyes, 'as to say that my presence is the reverse of disagreeable

to her, and you and everybody here being no less forbearing and tolerant towards one who - who certainly,' said Mr Toots, with momentary dejection, 'would appear to have been born by mistake, I shall come backwards and forwards of an evening, during the short time we can all be together. But what I ask is this. If, at any moment, I find that I cannot endure the contemplation of Lieutenant Walters's bliss, and should rush out, I hope, Captain Gills, that you and he will both consider it as my misfortune and not my fault, or the want of inward conflict. That you'll feel convinced I bear no malice to any living creature-least of all to Lieutenant Walters himself - and that you'll casually remark that I have gone out for a walk, or probably to see what o'clock it is by the Royal Exchange. Captain Gills, if you could enter into this arrangement, and could answer for Lieutenant Walters, it would be a relief to my feelings that I should think cheap at the sacrifice of a considerable portion of my property.'

'My lad,' returned the Captain, 'say no more. There ain't a colour you can run up, as won't be made out, and answered to, by Wal'r and self.'

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'my mind is greatly relieved. I wish to preserve the good opinion of all here. I - I - mean well, upon my honour, however badly I may show it. You know,' said Mr Toots, 'it's as exactly as Burgess and Co. wished to oblige a customer with a most extraordinary pair of trousers, and could not cut out what they had in their minds.'

With this apposite illustration, of which he seemed a little Proud, Mr Toots gave Captain Cuttle his blessing and departed.

The honest Captain, with his Heart's Delight in the house, and Susan tending her, was a beaming and a happy man. As the days flew by, he grew more beaming and more happy, every day. After some conferences with Susan (for whose wisdom the Captain had a profound respect, and whose valiant precipitation of herself on Mrs MacStinger he could never forget), he proposed to Florence that the daughter of the elderly lady who usually sat under the blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market, should, for prudential reasons and considerations of privacy, be superseded in the temporary discharge of the household duties, by someone who was not unknown to them, and in whom they could safely confide. Susan, being present, then named, in furtherance of a suggestion she had previously offered to the Captain, Mrs Richards. Florence brightened at the name. And Susan, setting off that very afternoon to the Toodle domicile, to sound Mrs Richards, returned in triumph the same evening, accompanied by the identical rosy-cheeked apple-faced Polly, whose demonstrations, when brought into Florence's presence, were hardly less affectionate than those of Susan Nipper herself.

This piece of generalship accomplished; from which the Captain derived uncommon satisfaction, as he did, indeed, from everything else that was done, whatever it happened to be; Florence had next to prepare Susan for their approaching separation. This was a much more difficult task, as Miss Nipper was of a resolute disposition, and had fully made up her mind that she had come back never to be parted from her old mistress any more.

'As to wages dear Miss Floy,' she said, 'you wouldn't hint and wrong me so as think of naming them, for I've put money by and wouldn't sell my love and duty at a time like this even if the Savings' Banks and me were total strangers or the Banks were broke to pieces, but you've never been without me darling from the time your poor dear Ma was took away, and though I'm nothing to be boasted of you're used to me and oh my own dear mistress through so many years don't think of going anywhere without me, for it mustn't and can't be!'

'Dear Susan, I am going on a long, long voyage.'

'Well Miss Floy, and what of that? the more you'll want me. Lengths of voyages ain't an object in my eyes, thank God!' said the impetuous Susan Nipper.

'But, Susan, I am going with Walter, and I would go with Walter anywhere - everywhere! Walter is poor, and I am very poor, and I must learn, now, both to help myself, and help him.'

'Dear Miss Floy!' cried Susan, bursting out afresh, and shaking her head violently, 'it's nothing new to you to help yourself and others too and be the patientest and truest of noble hearts, but let me talk to Mr Walter Gay and settle it with him, for suffer you to go away across the world alone I cannot, and I won't.'

'Alone, Susan?' returned Florence. 'Alone? and Walter taking me with him!' Ah, what a bright, amazed, enraptured smile was on her face! - He should have seen it. 'I am sure you will not speak to Walter if I ask you not,' she added tenderly; 'and pray don't, dear.'

Susan sobbed 'Why not, Miss Floy?'

'Because,' said Florence, 'I am going to be his wife, to give him up my whole heart, and to live with him and die with him. He might think, if you said to him what you have said to me, that I am afraid of what is before me, or that you have some cause to be afraid for me. Why, Susan, dear, I love him!'

Miss Nipper was so much affected by the quiet fervour of these words, and the simple, heartfelt, all-pervading earnestness expressed in

them, and making the speaker's face more beautiful and pure than ever, that she could only cling to her again, crying. Was her little mistress really, really going to be married, and pitying, caressing, and protecting her, as she had done before. But the Nipper, though susceptible of womanly weaknesses, was almost as capable of putting constraint upon herself as of attacking the redoubtable MacStinger. From that time, she never returned to the subject, but was always cheerful, active, bustling, and hopeful. She did, indeed, inform Mr Toots privately, that she was only 'keeping up' for the time, and that when it was all over, and Miss Dombey was gone, she might be expected to become a spectacle distressful; and Mr Toots did also express that it was his case too, and that they would mingle their tears together; but she never otherwise indulged her private feelings in the presence of Florence or within the precincts of the Midshipman.

Limited and plain as Florence's wardrobe was - what a contrast to that prepared for the last marriage in which she had taken part! - there was a good deal to do in getting it ready, and Susan Nipper worked away at her side, all day, with the concentrated zeal of fifty sempstresses. The wonderful contributions Captain Cuttle would have made to this branch of the outfit, if he had been permitted - as pink parasols, tinted silk stockings, blue shoes, and other articles no less necessary on shipboard - would occupy some space in the recital. He was induced, however, by various fraudulent representations, to limit his contributions to a work-box and dressing case, of each of which he purchased the very largest specimen that could be got for money. For ten days or a fortnight afterwards, he generally sat, during the greater part of the day, gazing at these boxes; divided between extreme admiration of them, and dejected misgivings that they were not gorgeous enough, and frequently diving out into the street to purchase some wild article that he deemed necessary to their completeness. But his master-stroke was, the bearing of them both off, suddenly, one morning, and getting the two words FLORENCE GAY engraved upon a brass heart inlaid over the lid of each. After this, he smoked four pipes successively in the little parlour by himself, and was discovered chuckling, at the expiration of as many hours.

Walter was busy and away all day, but came there every morning early to see Florence, and always passed the evening with her. Florence never left her high rooms but to steal downstairs to wait for him when it was his time to come, or, sheltered by his proud, encircling arm, to bear him company to the door again, and sometimes peep into the street. In the twilight they were always together. Oh blessed time! Oh wandering heart at rest! Oh deep, exhaustless, mighty well of love, in which so much was sunk!

The cruel mark was on her bosom yet. It rose against her father with the breath she drew, it lay between her and her lover when he pressed

her to his heart. But she forgot it. In the beating of that heart for her, and in the beating of her own for him, all harsher music was unheard, all stern unloving hearts forgotten. Fragile and delicate she was, but with a might of love within her that could, and did, create a world to fly to, and to rest in, out of his one image.

How often did the great house, and the old days, come before her in the twilight time, when she was sheltered by the arm, so proud, so fond, and, creeping closer to him, shrunk within it at the recollection! How often, from remembering the night when she went down to that room and met the never-to-be forgotten look, did she raise her eyes to those that watched her with such loving earnestness, and weep with happiness in such a refuge! The more she clung to it, the more the dear dead child was in her thoughts: but as if the last time she had seen her father, had been when he was sleeping and she kissed his face, she always left him so, and never, in her fancy, passed that hour.

'Walter, dear,' said Florence, one evening, when it was almost dark. 'Do you know what I have been thinking to-day?'

'Thinking how the time is flying on, and how soon we shall be upon the sea, sweet Florence?'

'I don't mean that, Walter, though I think of that too. I have been thinking what a charge I am to you.'

'A precious, sacred charge, dear heart! Why, I think that sometimes.'

'You are laughing, Walter. I know that's much more in your thoughts than mine. But I mean a cost.'

'A cost, my own?'

'In money, dear. All these preparations that Susan and I are so busy with - I have been able to purchase very little for myself. You were poor before. But how much poorer I shall make you, Walter!'

'And how much richer, Florence!'

Florence laughed, and shook her head.

'Besides,' said Walter, 'long ago - before I went to sea - I had a little purse presented to me, dearest, which had money in it.'

'Ah!' returned Florence, laughing sorrowfully, 'very little! very little, Walter! But, you must not think,' and here she laid her light hand on his shoulder, and looked into his face, 'that I regret to be this burden

on you. No, dear love, I am glad of it. I am happy in it. I wouldn't have it otherwise for all the world!

'Nor I, indeed, dear Florence.'

'Ay! but, Walter, you can never feel it as I do. I am so proud of you! It makes my heart swell with such delight to know that those who speak of you must say you married a poor disowned girl, who had taken shelter here; who had no other home, no other friends; who had nothing - nothing! Oh, Walter, if I could have brought you millions, I never could have been so happy for your sake, as I am!'

'And you, dear Florence? are you nothing?' he returned.

'No, nothing, Walter. Nothing but your wife.' The light hand stole about his neck, and the voice came nearer - nearer. 'I am nothing any more, that is not you. I have no earthly hope any more, that is not you. I have nothing dear to me any more, that is not you.'

Oh! well might Mr Toots leave the little company that evening, and twice go out to correct his watch by the Royal Exchange, and once to keep an appointment with a banker which he suddenly remembered, and once to take a little turn to Aldgate Pump and back!

But before he went upon these expeditions, or indeed before he came, and before lights were brought, Walter said:

'Florence, love, the lading of our ship is nearly finished, and probably on the very day of our marriage she will drop down the river. Shall we go away that morning, and stay in Kent until we go on board at Gravesend within a week?'

'If you please, Walter. I shall be happy anywhere. But - '

'Yes, my life?'

'You know,' said Florence, 'that we shall have no marriage party, and that nobody will distinguish us by our dress from other people. As we leave the same day, will you - will you take me somewhere that morning, Walter - early - before we go to church?'

Walter seemed to understand her, as so true a lover so truly loved should, and confirmed his ready promise with a kiss - with more than one perhaps, or two or threes or five or six; and in the grave, peaceful evening, Florence was very happy.

Then into the quiet room came Susan Nipper and the candles; shortly afterwards, the tea, the Captain, and the excursive Mr Toots, who, as

above mentioned, was frequently on the move afterwards, and passed but a restless evening. This, however, was not his habit: for he generally got on very well, by dint of playing at cribbage with the Captain under the advice and guidance of Miss Nipper, and distracting his mind with the calculations incidental to the game; which he found to be a very effectual means of utterly confounding himself.

The Captain's visage on these occasions presented one of the finest examples of combination and succession of expression ever observed. His instinctive delicacy and his chivalrous feeling towards Florence, taught him that it was not a time for any boisterous jollity, or violent display of satisfaction; floating reminiscences of Lovely Peg, on the other hand, were constantly struggling for a vent, and urging the Captain to commit himself by some irreparable demonstration. Anon, his admiration of Florence and Walter - well-matched, truly, and full of grace and interest in their youth, and love, and good looks, as they sat apart - would take such complete possession of him, that he would lay down his cards, and beam upon them, dabbing his head all over with his pocket-handkerchief; until warned, perhaps, by the sudden rushing forth of Mr Toots, that he had unconsciously been very instrumental, indeed, in making that gentleman miserable. This reflection would make the Captain profoundly melancholy, until the return of Mr Toots; when he would fall to his cards again, with many side winks and nods, and polite waves of his hook at Miss Nipper, importing that he wasn't going to do so any more. The state that ensued on this, was, perhaps, his best; for then, endeavouring to discharge all expression from his face, he would sit staring round the room, with all these expressions conveyed into it at once, and each wrestling with the other. Delighted admiration of Florence and Walter always overthrew the rest, and remained victorious and undisguised, unless Mr Toots made another rush into the air, and then the Captain would sit, like a remorseful culprit, until he came back again, occasionally calling upon himself, in a low reproachful voice, to 'Stand by!' or growling some remonstrance to 'Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad,' on the want of caution observable in his behaviour.

One of Mr Toots's hardest trials, however, was of his own seeking. On the approach of the Sunday which was to witness the last of those askings in church of which the Captain had spoken, Mr Toots thus stated his feelings to Susan Nipper.

'Susan,' said Mr Toots, 'I am drawn towards the building. The words which cut me off from Miss Dombey for ever, will strike upon my ears like a knell you know, but upon my word and honour, I feel that I must hear them. Therefore,' said Mr Toots, 'will you accompany me to-morrow, to the sacred edifice?'

Miss Nipper expressed her readiness to do so, if that would be any satisfaction to Mr Toots, but besought him to abandon his idea of going.

'Susan,' returned Mr Toots, with much solemnity, 'before my whiskers began to be observed by anybody but myself, I adored Miss Dombey. While yet a victim to the thralldom of Blimber, I adored Miss Dombey. When I could no longer be kept out of my property, in a legal point of view, and - and accordingly came into it - I adored Miss Dombey. The banns which consign her to Lieutenant Walters, and me to - to Gloom, you know,' said Mr Toots, after hesitating for a strong expression, 'may be dreadful, will be dreadful; but I feel that I should wish to hear them spoken. I feel that I should wish to know that the ground was certainly cut from under me, and that I hadn't a hope to cherish, or a - or a leg, in short, to - to go upon.'

Susan Nipper could only commiserate Mr Toots's unfortunate condition, and agree, under these circumstances, to accompany him; which she did next morning.

The church Walter had chosen for the purpose, was a mouldy old church in a yard, hemmed in by a labyrinth of back streets and courts, with a little burying-ground round it, and itself buried in a kind of vault, formed by the neighbouring houses, and paved with echoing stones. It was a great dim, shabby pile, with high old oaken pews, among which about a score of people lost themselves every Sunday; while the clergyman's voice drowsily resounded through the emptiness, and the organ rumbled and rolled as if the church had got the colic, for want of a congregation to keep the wind and damp out. But so far was this city church from languishing for the company of other churches, that spires were clustered round it, as the masts of shipping cluster on the river. It would have been hard to count them from its steeple-top, they were so many. In almost every yard and blind-place near, there was a church. The confusion of bells when Susan and Mr Toots betook themselves towards it on the Sunday morning, was deafening. There were twenty churches close together, clamouring for people to come in.

The two stray sheep in question were penned by a beadle in a commodious pew, and, being early, sat for some time counting the congregation, listening to the disappointed bell high up in the tower, or looking at a shabby little old man in the porch behind the screen, who was ringing the same, like the Bull in Cock Robin,' with his foot in a stirrup. Mr Toots, after a lengthened survey of the large books on the reading-desk, whispered Miss Nipper that he wondered where the banns were kept, but that young lady merely shook her head and frowned; repelling for the time all approaches of a temporal nature.

Mr Toots, however, appearing unable to keep his thoughts from the banns, was evidently looking out for them during the whole preliminary portion of the service. As the time for reading them approached, the poor young gentleman manifested great anxiety and trepidation, which was not diminished by the unexpected apparition of the Captain in the front row of the gallery. When the clerk handed up a list to the clergyman, Mr Toots, being then seated, held on by the seat of the pew; but when the names of Walter Gay and Florence Dombey were read aloud as being in the third and last stage of that association, he was so entirely conquered by his feelings as to rush from the church without his hat, followed by the beadle and pew-opener, and two gentlemen of the medical profession, who happened to be present; of whom the first-named presently returned for that article, informing Miss Nipper in a whisper that she was not to make herself uneasy about the gentleman, as the gentleman said his indisposition was of no consequence.

Miss Nipper, feeling that the eyes of that integral portion of Europe which lost itself weekly among the high-backed pews, were upon her, would have been sufficient embarrassed by this incident, though it had terminated here; the more so, as the Captain in the front row of the gallery, was in a state of unmitigated consciousness which could hardly fail to express to the congregation that he had some mysterious connection with it. But the extreme restlessness of Mr Toots painfully increased and protracted the delicacy of her situation. That young gentleman, incapable, in his state of mind, of remaining alone in the churchyard, a prey to solitary meditation, and also desirous, no doubt, of testifying his respect for the offices he had in some measure interrupted, suddenly returned - not coming back to the pew, but stationing himself on a free seat in the aisle, between two elderly females who were in the habit of receiving their portion of a weekly dole of bread then set forth on a shelf in the porch. In this conjunction Mr Toots remained, greatly disturbing the congregation, who felt it impossible to avoid looking at him, until his feelings overcame him again, when he departed silently and suddenly. Not venturing to trust himself in the church any more, and yet wishing to have some social participation in what was going on there, Mr Toots was, after this, seen from time to time, looking in, with a lorn aspect, at one or other of the windows; and as there were several windows accessible to him from without, and as his restlessness was very great, it not only became difficult to conceive at which window he would appear next, but likewise became necessary, as it were, for the whole congregation to speculate upon the chances of the different windows, during the comparative leisure afforded them by the sermon. Mr Toots's movements in the churchyard were so eccentric, that he seemed generally to defeat all calculation, and to appear, like the conjuror's figure, where he was least expected; and the effect of these mysterious presentations was much increased by its being difficult to him to see

in, and easy to everybody else to see out: which occasioned his remaining, every time, longer than might have been expected, with his face close to the glass, until he all at once became aware that all eyes were upon him, and vanished.

These proceedings on the part of Mr Toots, and the strong individual consciousness of them that was exhibited by the Captain, rendered Miss Nipper's position so responsible a one, that she was mightily relieved by the conclusion of the service; and was hardly so affable to Mr Toots as usual, when he informed her and the Captain, on the way back, that now he was sure he had no hope, you know, he felt more comfortable - at least not exactly more comfortable, but more comfortably and completely miserable.

Swiftly now, indeed, the time flew by until it was the evening before the day appointed for the marriage. They were all assembled in the upper room at the Midshipman's, and had no fear of interruption; for there were no lodgers in the house now, and the Midshipman had it all to himself. They were grave and quiet in the prospect of to-morrow, but moderately cheerful too. Florence, with Walter close beside her, was finishing a little piece of work intended as a parting gift to the Captain. The Captain was playing cribbage with Mr Toots. Mr Toots was taking counsel as to his hand, of Susan Nipper. Miss Nipper was giving it, with all due secrecy and circumspection. Diogenes was listening, and occasionally breaking out into a gruff half-smothered fragment of a bark, of which he afterwards seemed half-ashamed, as if he doubted having any reason for it.

'Steady, steady!' said the Captain to Diogenes, 'what's amiss with you? You don't seem easy in your mind to-night, my boy!'

Diogenes wagged his tail, but pricked up his ears immediately afterwards, and gave utterance to another fragment of a bark; for which he apologised to the Captain, by again wagging his tail.

'It's my opinion, Di,' said the Captain, looking thoughtfully at his cards, and stroking his chin with his hook, 'as you have your doubts of Mrs Richards; but if you're the animal I take you to be, you'll think better o' that; for her looks is her commission. Now, Brother:' to Mr Toots: 'if so be as you're ready, heave ahead.'

The Captain spoke with all composure and attention to the game, but suddenly his cards dropped out of his hand, his mouth and eyes opened wide, his legs drew themselves up and stuck out in front of his chair, and he sat staring at the door with blank amazement. Looking round upon the company, and seeing that none of them observed him or the cause of his astonishment, the Captain recovered himself with a great gasp, struck the table a tremendous blow, cried in a stentorian

roar, 'Sol Gills ahoy!' and tumbled into the arms of a weather-beaten pea-coat that had come with Polly into the room.

In another moment, Walter was in the arms of the weather-beaten pea-coat. In another moment, Florence was in the arms of the weather-beaten pea-coat. In another moment, Captain Cuttle had embraced Mrs Richards and Miss Nipper, and was violently shaking hands with Mr Toots, exclaiming, as he waved his hook above his head, 'Hooroar, my lad, hooroar!' To which Mr Toots, wholly at a loss to account for these proceedings, replied with great politeness, 'Certainly, Captain Gills, whatever you think proper!'

The weather-beaten pea-coat, and a no less weather-beaten cap and comforter belonging to it, turned from the Captain and from Florence back to Walter, and sounds came from the weather-beaten pea-coat, cap, and comforter, as of an old man sobbing underneath them; while the shaggy sleeves clasped Walter tight. During this pause, there was an universal silence, and the Captain polished his nose with great diligence. But when the pea-coat, cap, and comforter lifted themselves up again, Florence gently moved towards them; and she and Walter taking them off, disclosed the old Instrument-maker, a little thinner and more careworn than of old, in his old Welsh wig and his old coffee-coloured coat and basket buttons, with his old infallible chronometer ticking away in his pocket.

'Chock full o' science,' said the radiant Captain, 'as ever he was! Sol Gills, Sol Gills, what have you been up to, for this many a long day, my ould boy?'

'I'm half blind, Ned,' said the old man, 'and almost deaf and dumb with joy.'

'His wery woice,' said the Captain, looking round with an exultation to which even his face could hardly render justice - 'his wery woice as chock full o' science as ever it was! Sol Gills, lay to, my lad, upon your own wines and fig-trees like a taut ould patriark as you are, and overhaul them there adventures o' yourn, in your own formilior woice. 'Tis the woice,' said the Captain, impressively, and announcing a quotation with his hook, 'of the sluggard, I heerd him complain, you have woke me too soon, I must slumber again. Scatter his ene-mies, and make 'em fall!'

The Captain sat down with the air of a man who had happily expressed the feeling of everybody present, and immediately rose again to present Mr Toots, who was much disconcerted by the arrival of anybody, appearing to prefer a claim to the name of Gills.

'Although,' stammered Mr Toots, 'I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance, Sir, before you were - you were - '

'Lost to sight, to memory dear,' suggested the Captain, in a low voice.

Exactly so, Captain Gills!' assented Mr Toots. 'Although I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance, Mr - Mr Sols,' said Toots, hitting on that name in the inspiration of a bright idea, 'before that happened, I have the greatest pleasure, I assure you, in - you know, in knowing you. I hope,' said Mr Toots, 'that you're as well as can be expected.'

With these courteous words, Mr Toots sat down blushing and chuckling.

The old Instrument-maker, seated in a corner between Walter and Florence, and nodding at Polly, who was looking on, all smiles and delight, answered the Captain thus:

'Ned Cuttle, my dear boy, although I have heard something of the changes of events here, from my pleasant friend there - what a pleasant face she has to be sure, to welcome a wanderer home!' said the old man, breaking off, and rubbing his hands in his old dreamy way.

'Hear him!' cried the Captain gravely. 'Tis woman as seduces all mankind. For which,' aside to Mr Toots, 'you'll overhaul your Adam and Eve, brother.'

'I shall make a point of doing so, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots.

'Although I have heard something of the changes of events, from her,' resumed the Instrument-maker, taking his old spectacles from his pocket, and putting them on his forehead in his old manner, 'they are so great and unexpected, and I am so overpowered by the sight of my dear boy, and by the,' - glancing at the downcast eyes of Florence, and not attempting to finish the sentence - 'that I - I can't say much to-night. But my dear Ned Cuttle, why didn't you write?'

The astonishment depicted in the Captain's features positively frightened Mr Toots, whose eyes were quite fixed by it, so that he could not withdraw them from his face.

'Write!' echoed the Captain. 'Write, Sol Gills?'

'Ay,' said the old man, 'either to Barbados, or Jamaica, or Demerara, That was what I asked.'

'What you asked, Sol Gills?' repeated the Captain.

'Ay,' said the old man. 'Don't you know, Ned? Sure you have not forgotten? Every time I wrote to you.'

The Captain took off his glazed hat, hung it on his hook, and smoothing his hair from behind with his hand, sat gazing at the group around him: a perfect image of wondering resignation.

'You don't appear to understand me, Ned!' observed old Sol.

'Sol Gills,' returned the Captain, after staring at him and the rest for a long time, without speaking, 'I'm gone about and adrift. Pay out a word or two respecting them adventures, will you! Can't I bring up, nohow? Nohows?' said the Captain, ruminating, and staring all round.

'You know, Ned,' said Sol Gills, 'why I left here. Did you open my packet, Ned?'

'Why, ay, ay,' said the Captain. 'To be sure, I opened the packet.'

'And read it?' said the old man.

'And read it,' answered the Captain, eyeing him attentively, and proceeding to quote it from memory. 'My dear Ned Cuttle, when I left home for the West Indies in forlorn search of intelligence of my dear- There he sits! There's Wal'r!' said the Captain, as if he were relieved by getting hold of anything that was real and indisputable.

'Well, Ned. Now attend a moment!' said the old man. 'When I wrote first - that was from Barbados - I said that though you would receive that letter long before the year was out, I should be glad if you would open the packet, as it explained the reason of my going away. Very good, Ned. When I wrote the second, third, and perhaps the fourth times - that was from Jamaica - I said I was in just the same state, couldn't rest, and couldn't come away from that part of the world, without knowing that my boy was lost or saved. When I wrote next - that, I think, was from Demerara, wasn't it?'

'That he thinks was from Demerara, warn't it!' said the Captain, looking hopelessly round.

'I said,' proceeded old Sol, 'that still there was no certain information got yet. That I found many captains and others, in that part of the world, who had known me for years, and who assisted me with a passage here and there, and for whom I was able, now and then, to do a little in return, in my own craft. That everyone was sorry for me, and seemed to take a sort of interest in my wanderings; and that I began

to think it would be my fate to cruise about in search of tidings of my boy, until I died.'

'Began to think as how he was a scientific Flying Dutchman!' said the Captain, as before, and with great seriousness.

'But when the news come one day, Ned, - that was to Barbados, after I got back there, - that a China trader home'ard bound had been spoke, that had my boy aboard, then, Ned, I took passage in the next ship and came home; arrived at home to-night to find it true, thank God!' said the old man, devoutly.

The Captain, after bowing his head with great reverence, stared all round the circle, beginning with Mr Toots, and ending with the Instrument-maker; then gravely said:

'Sol Gills! The observation as I'm a-going to make is calc'lated to blow every stitch of sail as you can carry, clean out of the bolt-ropes, and bring you on your beam ends with a lurch. Not one of them letters was ever delivered to Ed'ard Cuttle. Not one o' them letters,' repeated the Captain, to make his declaration the more solemn and impressive, 'was ever delivered unto Ed'ard Cuttle, Mariner, of England, as lives at home at ease, and doth improve each shining hour!'

'And posted by my own hand! And directed by my own hand, Number nine Brig Place!' exclaimed old Sol.

The colour all went out of the Captain's face and all came back again in a glow.

'What do you mean, Sol Gills, my friend, by Number nine Brig Place?' inquired the Captain.

'Mean? Your lodgings, Ned,' returned the old man. 'Mrs What's-her-name! I shall forget my own name next, but I am behind the present time - I always was, you recollect - and very much confused. Mrs - '

'Sol Gills!' said the Captain, as if he were putting the most improbable case in the world, 'it ain't the name of MacStinger as you're a trying to remember?'

'Of course it is!' exclaimed the Instrument-maker. 'To be sure Ned. Mrs MacStinger!'

Captain Cuttle, whose eyes were now as wide open as they would be, and the knobs upon whose face were perfectly luminous, gave a long shrill whistle of a most melancholy sound, and stood gazing at everybody in a state of speechlessness.

'Overhaul that there again, Sol Gills, will you be so kind?' he said at last.

'All these letters,' returned Uncle Sol, beating time with the forefinger of his right hand upon the palm of his left, with a steadiness and distinctness that might have done honour, even to the infallible chronometer in his pocket, 'I posted with my own hand, and directed with my own hand, to Captain Cuttle, at Mrs MacStinger's, Number nine Brig Place.'

The Captain took his glazed hat off his hook, looked into it, put it on, and sat down.

'Why, friends all,' said the Captain, staring round in the last state of discomfiture, 'I cut and run from there!'

'And no one knew where you were gone, Captain Cuttle?' cried Walter hastily.

'Bless your heart, Wal'r,' said the Captain, shaking his head, 'she'd never have allowed o' my coming to take charge o' this here property. Nothing could be done but cut and run. Lord love you, Wal'r!' said the Captain, 'you've only seen her in a calm! But see her when her angry passions rise - and make a note on!'

'I'd give it her!' remarked the Nipper, softly.

'Would you, do you think, my dear?' returned the Captain, with feeble admiration. 'Well, my dear, it does you credit. But there ain't no wild animal I wouldn't sooner face myself. I only got my chest away by means of a friend as nobody's a match for. It was no good sending any letter there. She wouldn't take in any letter, bless you,' said the Captain, 'under them circumstances! Why, you could hardly make it worth a man's while to be the postman!'

'Then it's pretty clear, Captain Cuttle, that all of us, and you and Uncle Sol especially,' said Walter, 'may thank Mrs MacStinger for no small anxiety.'

The general obligation in this wise to the determined relict of the late Mr MacStinger, was so apparent, that the Captain did not contest the point; but being in some measure ashamed of his position, though nobody dwelt upon the subject, and Walter especially avoided it, remembering the last conversation he and the Captain had held together respecting it, he remained under a cloud for nearly five minutes - an extraordinary period for him when that sun, his face, broke out once more, shining on all beholders with extraordinary

brilliancy; and he fell into a fit of shaking hands with everybody over and over again.

At an early hour, but not before Uncle Sol and Walter had questioned each other at some length about their voyages and dangers, they all, except Walter, vacated Florence's room, and went down to the parlour. Here they were soon afterwards joined by Walter, who told them Florence was a little sorrowful and heavy-hearted, and had gone to bed. Though they could not have disturbed her with their voices down there, they all spoke in a whisper after this: and each, in his different way, felt very lovingly and gently towards Walter's fair young bride: and a long explanation there was of everything relating to her, for the satisfaction of Uncle Sol; and very sensible Mr Toots was of the delicacy with which Walter made his name and services important, and his presence necessary to their little council.

'Mr Toots,' said Walter, on parting with him at the house door, 'we shall see each other to-morrow morning?'

'Lieutenant Walters,' returned Mr Toots, grasping his hand fervently, 'I shall certainly be present.

'This is the last night we shall meet for a long time - the last night we may ever meet,' said Walter. 'Such a noble heart as yours, must feel, I think, when another heart is bound to it. I hope you know that I am very grateful to you?'

'Walters,' replied Mr Toots, quite touched, 'I should be glad to feel that you had reason to be so.'

'Florence,' said Walter, 'on this last night of her bearing her own name, has made me promise - it was only just now, when you left us together - that I would tell you - with her dear love - '

Mr Toots laid his hand upon the doorpost, and his eyes upon his hand.

- with her dear love,' said Walter, 'that she can never have a friend whom she will value above you. That the recollection of your true consideration for her always, can never be forgotten by her. That she remembers you in her prayers to-night, and hopes that you will think of her when she is far away. Shall I say anything for you?'

'Say, Walter,' replied Mr Toots indistinctly, 'that I shall think of her every day, but never without feeling happy to know that she is married to the man she loves, and who loves her. Say, if you please, that I am sure her husband deserves her - even her!- and that I am glad of her choice.'

Mr Toots got more distinct as he came to these last words, and raising his eyes from the doorpost, said them stoutly. He then shook Walter's hand again with a fervour that Walter was not slow to return and started homeward.

Mr Toots was accompanied by the Chicken, whom he had of late brought with him every evening, and left in the shop, with an idea that unforeseen circumstances might arise from without, in which the prowess of that distinguished character would be of service to the Midshipman. The Chicken did not appear to be in a particularly good humour on this occasion. Either the gas-lamps were treacherous, or he cocked his eye in a hideous manner, and likewise distorted his nose, when Mr Toots, crossing the road, looked back over his shoulder at the room where Florence slept. On the road home, he was more demonstrative of aggressive intentions against the other foot-passengers, than comported with a professor of the peaceful art of self-defence. Arrived at home, instead of leaving Mr Toots in his apartments when he had escorted him thither, he remained before him weighing his white hat in both hands by the brim, and twitching his head and nose (both of which had been many times broken, and but indifferently repaired), with an air of decided disrespect.

His patron being much engaged with his own thoughts, did not observe this for some time, nor indeed until the Chicken, determined not to be overlooked, had made divers clicking sounds with his tongue and teeth, to attract attention.

'Now, Master,' said the Chicken, doggedly, when he, at length, caught Mr Toots's eye, 'I want to know whether this here gammon is to finish it, or whether you're a going in to win?'

'Chicken,' returned Mr Toots, 'explain yourself.'

'Why then, here's all about it, Master,' said the Chicken. 'I ain't a cove to chuck a word away. Here's wot it is. Are any on 'em to be doubled up?'

When the Chicken put this question he dropped his hat, made a dodge and a feint with his left hand, hit a supposed enemy a violent blow with his right, shook his head smartly, and recovered himself

'Come, Master,' said the Chicken. 'Is it to be gammon or pluck? Which?'

Chicken,' returned Mr Toots, 'your expressions are coarse, and your meaning is obscure.'

'Why, then, I tell you what, Master,' said the Chicken. 'This is where it is. It's mean.'

'What is mean, Chicken?' asked Mr Toots.

'It is,' said the Chicken, with a frightful corrugation of his broken nose. 'There! Now, Master! Wot! When you could go and blow on this here match to the stiff'un;' by which depreciatory appellation it has been since supposed that the Game One intended to signify Mr Dombey; 'and when you could knock the winner and all the kit of 'em dead out o' wind and time, are you going to give in? To give in?' said the Chicken, with contemptuous emphasis. 'Wy, it's mean!'

'Chicken,' said Mr Toots, severely, 'you're a perfect Vulture! Your sentiments are atrocious.'

'My sentiments is Game and Fancy, Master,' returned the Chicken. 'That's wot my sentiments is. I can't abear a meanness. I'm afore the public, I'm to be heerd on at the bar of the Little Helephant, and no Gov'ner o' mine mustn't go and do what's mean. Wy, it's mean,' said the Chicken, with increased expression. 'That's where it is. It's mean.'

'Chicken,' said Mr Toots, 'you disgust me.'

'Master,' returned the Chicken, putting on his hat, 'there's a pair on us, then. Come! Here's a offer! You've spoke to me more than once't or twice't about the public line. Never mind! Give me a fi'typunnote to-morrow, and let me go.'

'Chicken,' returned Mr Toots, 'after the odious sentiments you have expressed, I shall be glad to part on such terms.'

'Done then,' said the Chicken. 'It's a bargain. This here conduct of yourn won't suit my book, Master. Wy, it's mean,' said the Chicken; who seemed equally unable to get beyond that point, and to stop short of it. 'That's where it is; it's mean!'

So Mr Toots and the Chicken agreed to part on this incompatibility of moral perception; and Mr Toots lying down to sleep, dreamed happily of Florence, who had thought of him as her friend upon the last night of her maiden life, and who had sent him her dear love