

Chapter LIX - Retribution

Changes have come again upon the great house in the long dull street, once the scene of Florence's childhood and loneliness. It is a great house still, proof against wind and weather, without breaches in the roof, or shattered windows, or dilapidated walls; but it is a ruin none the less, and the rats fly from it.

Mr Towlinson and company are, at first, incredulous in respect of the shapeless rumours that they hear. Cook says our people's credit ain't so easy shook as that comes to, thank God; and Mr Towlinson expects to hear it reported next, that the Bank of England's a-going to break, or the jewels in the Tower to be sold up. But, next come the Gazette, and Mr Perch; and Mr Perch brings Mrs Perch to talk it over in the kitchen, and to spend a pleasant evening.

As soon as there is no doubt about it, Mr Towlinson's main anxiety is that the failure should be a good round one - not less than a hundred thousand pound. Mr Perch don't think himself that a hundred thousand pound will nearly cover it. The women, led by Mrs Perch and Cook, often repeat 'a hun-dred thou-sand pound!' with awful satisfaction - as if handling the words were like handling the money; and the housemaid, who has her eye on Mr Towlinson, wishes she had only a hundredth part of the sum to bestow on the man of her choice. Mr Towlinson, still mindful of his old wrong, opines that a foreigner would hardly know what to do with so much money, unless he spent it on his whiskers; which bitter sarcasm causes the housemaid to withdraw in tears.

But not to remain long absent; for Cook, who has the reputation of being extremely good-hearted, says, whatever they do, let 'em stand by one another now, Towlinson, for there's no telling how soon they may be divided. They have been in that house (says Cook) through a funeral, a wedding, and a running-away; and let it not be said that they couldn't agree among themselves at such a time as the present. Mrs Perch is immensely affected by this moving address, and openly remarks that Cook is an angel. Mr Towlinson replies to Cook, far be it from him to stand in the way of that good feeling which he could wish to see; and adjourning in quest of the housemaid, and presently returning with that young lady on his arm, informs the kitchen that foreigners is only his fun, and that him and Anne have now resolved to take one another for better for worse, and to settle in Oxford Market in the general greengrocery and herb and leech line, where your kind favours is particular requested. This announcement is received with acclamation; and Mrs Perch, projecting her soul into futurity, says, 'girls,' in Cook's ear, in a solemn whisper.

Misfortune in the family without feasting, in these lower regions, couldn't be. Therefore Cook tosses up a hot dish or two for supper, and Mr Towlinson compounds a lobster salad to be devoted to the same hospitable purpose. Even Mrs Pipchin, agitated by the occasion, rings her bell, and sends down word that she requests to have that little bit of sweetbread that was left, warmed up for her supper, and sent to her on a tray with about a quarter of a tumbler-full of mulled sherry; for she feels poorly.

There is a little talk about Mr Dombey, but very little. It is chiefly speculation as to how long he has known that this was going to happen. Cook says shrewdly, 'Oh a long time, bless you! Take your oath of that.' And reference being made to Mr Perch, he confirms her view of the case. Somebody wonders what he'll do, and whether he'll go out in any situation. Mr Towlinson thinks not, and hints at a refuge in one of them genteel almshouses of the better kind. 'Ah, where he'll have his little garden, you know,' says Cook plaintively, 'and bring up sweet peas in the spring.' 'Exactly so,' says Mr Towlinson, 'and be one of the Brethren of something or another.' 'We are all brethren,' says Mrs Perch, in a pause of her drink. 'Except the sisters,' says Mr Perch. 'How are the mighty fallen!' remarks Cook. 'Pride shall have a fall, and it always was and will be so!' observes the housemaid.

It is wonderful how good they feel, in making these reflections; and what a Christian unanimity they are sensible of, in bearing the common shock with resignation. There is only one interruption to this excellent state of mind, which is occasioned by a young kitchen-maid of inferior rank - in black stockings - who, having sat with her mouth open for a long time, unexpectedly discharges from it words to this effect, 'Suppose the wages shouldn't be paid!' The company sit for a moment speechless; but Cook recovering first, turns upon the young woman, and requests to know how she dares insult the family, whose bread she eats, by such a dishonest supposition, and whether she thinks that anybody, with a scrap of honour left, could deprive poor servants of their pittance? 'Because if that is your religious feelings, Mary Daws,' says Cook warmly, 'I don't know where you mean to go to.'

Mr Towlinson don't know either; nor anybody; and the young kitchen-maid, appearing not to know exactly, herself, and scouted by the general voice, is covered with confusion, as with a garment.

After a few days, strange people begin to call at the house, and to make appointments with one another in the dining-room, as if they lived there. Especially, there is a gentleman, of a Mosaic Arabian cast of countenance, with a very massive watch-guard, who whistles in the drawing-room, and, while he is waiting for the other gentleman, who

always has pen and ink in his pocket, asks Mr Towlinson (by the easy name of 'Old Cock,') if he happens to know what the figure of them crimson and gold hangings might have been, when new bought. The callers and appointments in the dining-room become more numerous every day, and every gentleman seems to have pen and ink in his pocket, and to have some occasion to use it. At last it is said that there is going to be a Sale; and then more people arrive, with pen and ink in their pockets, commanding a detachment of men with carpet caps, who immediately begin to pull up the carpets, and knock the furniture about, and to print off thousands of impressions of their shoes upon the hall and staircase.

The council downstairs are in full conclave all this time, and, having nothing to do, perform perfect feats of eating. At length, they are one day summoned in a body to Mrs Pipchin's room, and thus addressed by the fair Peruvian:

'Your master's in difficulties,' says Mrs Pipchin, tartly. 'You know that, I suppose?'

Mr Towlinson, as spokesman, admits a general knowledge of the fact.

'And you're all on the look-out for yourselves, I warrant you, says Mrs Pipchin, shaking her head at them.

A shrill voice from the rear exclaims, 'No more than yourself!'

'That's your opinion, Mrs Impudence, is it?' says the ireful Pipchin, looking with a fiery eye over the intermediate heads.

'Yes, Mrs Pipchin, it is,' replies Cook, advancing. 'And what then, pray?'

'Why, then you may go as soon as you like,' says Mrs Pipchin. 'The sooner the better; and I hope I shall never see your face again.'

With this the doughty Pipchin produces a canvas bag; and tells her wages out to that day, and a month beyond it; and clutches the money tight, until a receipt for the same is duly signed, to the last upstroke; when she grudgingly lets it go. This form of proceeding Mrs Pipchin repeats with every member of the household, until all are paid.

'Now those that choose, can go about their business,' says Mrs Pipchin, 'and those that choose can stay here on board wages for a week or so, and make themselves useful. Except,' says the inflammable Pipchin, 'that slut of a cook, who'll go immediately.'

'That,' says Cook, 'she certainly will! I wish you good day, Mrs Pipchin, and sincerely wish I could compliment you on the sweetness of your appearance!'

'Get along with you,' says Mrs Pipchin, stamping her foot.

Cook sails off with an air of beneficent dignity, highly exasperating to Mrs Pipchin, and is shortly joined below stairs by the rest of the confederation.

Mr Towlinson then says that, in the first place, he would beg to propose a little snack of something to eat; and over that snack would desire to offer a suggestion which he thinks will meet the position in which they find themselves. The refreshment being produced, and very heartily partaken of, Mr Towlinson's suggestion is, in effect, that Cook is going, and that if we are not true to ourselves, nobody will be true to us. That they have lived in that house a long time, and exerted themselves very much to be sociable together. (At this, Cook says, with emotion, 'Hear, hear!' and Mrs Perch, who is there again, and full to the throat, sheds tears.) And that he thinks, at the present time, the feeling ought to be 'Go one, go all!' The housemaid is much affected by this generous sentiment, and warmly seconds it. Cook says she feels it's right, and only hopes it's not done as a compliment to her, but from a sense of duty. Mr Towlinson replies, from a sense of duty; and that now he is driven to express his opinions, he will openly say, that he does not think it over-respectable to remain in a house where Sales and such-like are carrying forwards. The housemaid is sure of it; and relates, in confirmation, that a strange man, in a carpet cap, offered, this very morning, to kiss her on the stairs. Hereupon, Mr Towlinson is starting from his chair, to seek and 'smash' the offender; when he is laid hold on by the ladies, who beseech him to calm himself, and to reflect that it is easier and wiser to leave the scene of such indecencies at once. Mrs Perch, presenting the case in a new light, even shows that delicacy towards Mr Dombey, shut up in his own rooms, imperatively demands precipitate retreat. 'For what,' says the good woman, 'must his feelings be, if he was to come upon any of the poor servants that he once deceived into thinking him immensely rich!' Cook is so struck by this moral consideration, that Mrs Perch improves it with several pious axioms, original and selected. It becomes a clear case that they must all go. Boxes are packed, cabs fetched, and at dusk that evening there is not one member of the party left.

The house stands, large and weather-proof, in the long dull street; but it is a ruin, and the rats fly from it.

The men in the carpet caps go on tumbling the furniture about; and the gentlemen with the pens and ink make out inventories of it, and

sit upon pieces of furniture never made to be sat upon, and eat bread and cheese from the public-house on other pieces of furniture never made to be eaten on, and seem to have a delight in appropriating precious articles to strange uses. Chaotic combinations of furniture also take place. Mattresses and bedding appear in the dining-room; the glass and china get into the conservatory; the great dinner service is set out in heaps on the long divan in the large drawing-room; and the stair-wires, made into fascces, decorate the marble chimneypieces. Finally, a rug, with a printed bill upon it, is hung out from the balcony; and a similar appendage graces either side of the hall door.

Then, all day long, there is a retinue of mouldy gigs and chaise-carts in the street; and herds of shabby vampires, Jew and Christian, overrun the house, sounding the plate-glass minors with their knuckles, striking discordant octaves on the Grand Piano, drawing wet forefingers over the pictures, breathing on the blades of the best dinner-knives, punching the squabs of chairs and sofas with their dirty fists, touzling the feather beds, opening and shutting all the drawers, balancing the silver spoons and forks, looking into the very threads of the drapery and linen, and disparaging everything. There is not a secret place in the whole house. Fluffy and snuffy strangers stare into the kitchen-range as curiously as into the attic clothes-press. Stout men with napless hats on, look out of the bedroom windows, and cut jokes with friends in the street. Quiet, calculating spirits withdraw into the dressing-rooms with catalogues, and make marginal notes thereon, with stumps of pencils. Two brokers invade the very fire-escape, and take a panoramic survey of the neighbourhood from the top of the house. The swarm and buzz, and going up and down, endure for days. The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is on view.

Then there is a palisade of tables made in the best drawing-room; and on the capital, french-polished, extending, telescopic range of Spanish mahogany dining-tables with turned legs, the pulpit of the Auctioneer is erected; and the herds of shabby vampires, Jew and Christian, the strangers fluffy and snuffy, and the stout men with the napless hats, congregate about it and sit upon everything within reach, mantel-pieces included, and begin to bid. Hot, humming, and dusty are the rooms all day; and - high above the heat, hum, and dust - the head and shoulders, voice and hammer, of the Auctioneer, are ever at work. The men in the carpet caps get flustered and vicious with tumbling the Lots about, and still the Lots are going, going, gone; still coming on. Sometimes there is joking and a general roar. This lasts all day and three days following. The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is on sale.

Then the mouldy gigs and chaise-carts reappear; and with them come spring-vans and waggons, and an army of porters with knots. All day

long, the men with carpet caps are screwing at screw-drivers and bed-winchers, or staggering by the dozen together on the staircase under heavy burdens, or upheaving perfect rocks of Spanish mahogany, best rose-wood, or plate-glass, into the gigs and chaise-carts, vans and waggons. All sorts of vehicles of burden are in attendance, from a tilted waggon to a wheelbarrow. Poor Paul's little bedstead is carried off in a donkey-tandem. For nearly a whole week, the Capital Modern Household Furniture, & c., is in course of removal.

At last it is all gone. Nothing is left about the house but scattered leaves of catalogues, littered scraps of straw and hay, and a battery of pewter pots behind the hall-door. The men with the carpet-caps gather up their screw-drivers and bed-winchers into bags, shoulder them, and walk off. One of the pen-and-ink gentlemen goes over the house as a last attention; sticking up bills in the windows respecting the lease of this desirable family mansion, and shutting the shutters. At length he follows the men with the carpet caps. None of the invaders remain. The house is a ruin, and the rats fly from it.

Mrs Pipchin's apartments, together with those locked rooms on the ground-floor where the window-blinds are drawn down close, have been spared the general devastation. Mrs Pipchin has remained austere and stony during the proceedings, in her own room; or has occasionally looked in at the sale to see what the goods are fetching, and to bid for one particular easy chair. Mrs Pipchin has been the highest bidder for the easy chair, and sits upon her property when Mrs Chick comes to see her.

'How is my brother, Mrs Pipchin?' says Mrs Chick.

'I don't know any more than the deuce,' says Mrs Pipchin. 'He never does me the honour to speak to me. He has his meat and drink put in the next room to his own; and what he takes, he comes out and takes when there's nobody there. It's no use asking me. I know no more about him than the man in the south who burnt his mouth by eating cold plum porridge.'

This the acrimonious Pipchin says with a flounce.

'But good gracious me!' cries Mrs Chick blandly. 'How long is this to last! If my brother will not make an effort, Mrs Pipchin, what is to become of him? I am sure I should have thought he had seen enough of the consequences of not making an effort, by this time, to be warned against that fatal error.'

'Hoity toity!' says Mrs Pipchin, rubbing her nose. 'There's a great fuss, I think, about it. It ain't so wonderful a case. People have had

misfortunes before now, and been obliged to part with their furniture. I'm sure I have!

'My brother,' pursues Mrs Chick profoundly, 'is so peculiar - so strange a man. He is the most peculiar man I ever saw. Would anyone believe that when he received news of the marriage and emigration of that unnatural child - it's a comfort to me, now, to remember that I always said there was something extraordinary about that child: but nobody minds me - would anybody believe, I say, that he should then turn round upon me and say he had supposed, from my manner, that she had come to my house? Why, my gracious! And would anybody believe that when I merely say to him, 'Paul, I may be very foolish, and I have no doubt I am, but I cannot understand how your affairs can have got into this state,' he should actually fly at me, and request that I will come to see him no more until he asks me! Why, my goodness!'

'Ah!' says Mrs Pipchin. 'It's a pity he hadn't a little more to do with mines. They'd have tried his temper for him.'

'And what,' resumes Mrs Chick, quite regardless of Mrs Pipchin's observations, 'is it to end in? That's what I want to know. What does my brother mean to do? He must do something. It's of no use remaining shut up in his own rooms. Business won't come to him. No. He must go to it. Then why don't he go? He knows where to go, I suppose, having been a man of business all his life. Very good. Then why not go there?'

Mrs Chick, after forging this powerful chain of reasoning, remains silent for a minute to admire it.

'Besides,' says the discreet lady, with an argumentative air, 'who ever heard of such obstinacy as his staying shut up here through all these dreadful disagreeables? It's not as if there was no place for him to go to. Of course he could have come to our house. He knows he is at home there, I suppose? Mr Chick has perfectly bored about it, and I said with my own lips, 'Why surely, Paul, you don't imagine that because your affairs have got into this state, you are the less at home to such near relatives as ourselves? You don't imagine that we are like the rest of the world?' But no; here he stays all through, and here he is. Why, good gracious me, suppose the house was to be let! What would he do then? He couldn't remain here then. If he attempted to do so, there would be an ejection, an action for Doe, and all sorts of things; and then he must go. Then why not go at first instead of at last? And that brings me back to what I said just now, and I naturally ask what is to be the end of it?'

'I know what's to be the end of it, as far as I am concerned,' replies Mrs Pipchin, 'and that's enough for me. I'm going to take myself off in a jiffy.'

'In a which, Mrs Pipchin,' says Mrs Chick.

'In a jiffy,' retorts Mrs Pipchin sharply.

'Ah, well! really I can't blame you, Mrs Pipchin,' says Mrs Chick, with frankness.

'It would be pretty much the same to me, if you could,' replies the sardonic Pipchin. 'At any rate I'm going. I can't stop here. I should be dead in a week. I had to cook my own pork chop yesterday, and I'm not used to it. My constitution will be giving way next. Besides, I had a very fair connexion at Brighton when I came here - little Pankey's folks alone were worth a good eighty pounds a-year to me - and I can't afford to throw it away. I've written to my niece, and she expects me by this time.'

'Have you spoken to my brother?' inquires Mrs Chick

'Oh, yes, it's very easy to say speak to him,' retorts Mrs Pipchin. 'How is it done? I called out to him yesterday, that I was no use here, and that he had better let me send for Mrs Richards. He grunted something or other that meant yes, and I sent. Grunt indeed! If he had been Mr Pipchin, he'd have had some reason to grunt. Yah! I've no patience with it!'

Here this exemplary female, who has pumped up so much fortitude and virtue from the depths of the Peruvian mines, rises from her cushioned property to see Mrs Chick to the door. Mrs Chick, deploring to the last the peculiar character of her brother, noiselessly retires, much occupied with her own sagacity and clearness of head.

In the dusk of the evening Mr Toodle, being off duty, arrives with Polly and a box, and leaves them, with a sounding kiss, in the hall of the empty house, the retired character of which affects Mr Toodle's spirits strongly.

'I tell you what, Polly, me dear,' says Mr Toodle, 'being now an engine-driver, and well to do in the world, I shouldn't allow of your coming here, to be made dull-like, if it warn't for favours past. But favours past, Polly, is never to be forgot. To them which is in adversity, besides, your face is a cord'l. So let's have another kiss on it, my dear. You wish no better than to do a right act, I know; and my views is, that it's right and dutiful to do this. Good-night, Polly!'

Mrs Pipchin by this time looms dark in her black bombazeen skirts, black bonnet, and shawl; and has her personal property packed up; and has her chair (late a favourite chair of Mr Dombey's and the dead bargain of the sale) ready near the street door; and is only waiting for a fly-van, going to-night to Brighton on private service, which is to call for her, by private contract, and convey her home.

Presently it comes. Mrs Pipchin's wardrobe being handed in and stowed away, Mrs Pipchin's chair is next handed in, and placed in a convenient corner among certain trusses of hay; it being the intention of the amiable woman to occupy the chair during her journey. Mrs Pipchin herself is next handed in, and grimly takes her seat. There is a snaky gleam in her hard grey eye, as of anticipated rounds of buttered toast, relays of hot chops, worryings and quellings of young children, sharp snappings at poor Berry, and all the other delights of her Ogress's castle. Mrs Pipchin almost laughs as the fly-van drives off, and she composes her black bombazeen skirts, and settles herself among the cushions of her easy chair.

The house is such a ruin that the rats have fled, and there is not one left.

But Polly, though alone in the deserted mansion - for there is no companionship in the shut-up rooms in which its late master hides his head - is not alone long. It is night; and she is sitting at work in the housekeeper's room, trying to forget what a lonely house it is, and what a history belongs to it; when there is a knock at the hall door, as loud sounding as any knock can be, striking into such an empty place. Opening it, she returns across the echoing hall, accompanied by a female figure in a close black bonnet. It is Miss Tox, and Miss Tox's eyes are red.

'Oh, Polly,' says Miss Tox, 'when I looked in to have a little lesson with the children just now, I got the message that you left for me; and as soon as I could recover my spirits at all, I came on after you. Is there no one here but you?'

'Ah! not a soul,' says Polly.

'Have you seen him?' whispers Miss Tox.

'Bless you,' returns Polly, 'no; he has not been seen this many a day. They tell me he never leaves his room.'

'Is he said to be ill?' inquires Miss Tox.

'No, Ma'am, not that I know of,' returns Polly, 'except in his mind. He must be very bad there, poor gentleman!'

Miss Tox's sympathy is such that she can scarcely speak. She is no chicken, but she has not grown tough with age and celibacy. Her heart is very tender, her compassion very genuine, her homage very real. Beneath the locket with the fishy eye in it, Miss Tox bears better qualities than many a less whimsical outside; such qualities as will outlive, by many courses of the sun, the best outsides and brightest husks that fall in the harvest of the great reaper.

It is long before Miss Tox goes away, and before Polly, with a candle flaring on the blank stairs, looks after her, for company, down the street, and feels unwilling to go back into the dreary house, and jar its emptiness with the heavy fastenings of the door, and glide away to bed. But all this Polly does; and in the morning sets in one of those darkened rooms such matters as she has been advised to prepare, and then retires and enters them no more until next morning at the same hour. There are bells there, but they never ring; and though she can sometimes hear a footfall going to and fro, it never comes out.

Miss Tox returns early in the day. It then begins to be Miss Tox's occupation to prepare little dainties - or what are such to her - to be carried into these rooms next morning. She derives so much satisfaction from the pursuit, that she enters on it regularly from that time; and brings daily in her little basket, various choice condiments selected from the scanty stores of the deceased owner of the powdered head and pigtail. She likewise brings, in sheets of curl-paper, morsels of cold meats, tongues of sheep, halves of fowls, for her own dinner; and sharing these collations with Polly, passes the greater part of her time in the ruined house that the rats have fled from: hiding, in a fright at every sound, stealing in and out like a criminal; only desiring to be true to the fallen object of her admiration, unknown to him, unknown to all the world but one poor simple woman.

The Major knows it; but no one is the wiser for that, though the Major is much the merrier. The Major, in a fit of curiosity, has charged the Native to watch the house sometimes, and find out what becomes of Dombey. The Native has reported Miss Tox's fidelity, and the Major has nearly choked himself dead with laughter. He is permanently bluer from that hour, and constantly wheezes to himself, his lobster eyes starting out of his head, 'Damme, Sir, the woman's a born idiot!'

And the ruined man. How does he pass the hours, alone?

'Let him remember it in that room, years to come!' He did remember it. It was heavy on his mind now; heavier than all the rest.

'Let him remember it in that room, years to come! The rain that falls upon the roof, the wind that mourns outside the door, may have

foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!

He did remember it. In the miserable night he thought of it; in the dreary day, the wretched dawn, the ghostly, memory-haunted twilight. He did remember it. In agony, in sorrow, in remorse, in despair! 'Papa! Papa! Speak to me, dear Papa!' He heard the words again, and saw the face. He saw it fall upon the trembling hands, and heard the one prolonged low cry go upward.

He was fallen, never to be raised up any more. For the night of his worldly ruin there was no to-morrow's sun; for the stain of his domestic shame there was no purification; nothing, thank Heaven, could bring his dead child back to life. But that which he might have made so different in all the Past - which might have made the Past itself so different, though this he hardly thought of now - that which was his own work, that which he could so easily have wrought into a blessing, and had set himself so steadily for years to form into a curse: that was the sharp grief of his soul.

Oh! He did remember it! The rain that fell upon the roof, the wind that mourned outside the door that night, had had foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. He knew, now, what he had done. He knew, now, that he had called down that upon his head, which bowed it lower than the heaviest stroke of fortune. He knew, now, what it was to be rejected and deserted; now, when every loving blossom he had withered in his innocent daughter's heart was snowing down in ashes on him.

He thought of her, as she had been that night when he and his bride came home. He thought of her as she had been, in all the home-events of the abandoned house. He thought, now, that of all around him, she alone had never changed. His boy had faded into dust, his proud wife had sunk into a polluted creature, his flatterer and friend had been transformed into the worst of villains, his riches had melted away, the very walls that sheltered him looked on him as a stranger; she alone had turned the same mild gentle look upon him always. Yes, to the latest and the last. She had never changed to him - nor had he ever changed to her - and she was lost.

As, one by one, they fell away before his mind - his baby- hope, his wife, his friend, his fortune - oh how the mist, through which he had seen her, cleared, and showed him her true self! Oh, how much better than this that he had loved her as he had his boy, and lost her as he had his boy, and laid them in their early grave together!

In his pride - for he was proud yet - he let the world go from him freely. As it fell away, he shook it off. Whether he imagined its face as

expressing pity for him, or indifference to him, he shunned it alike. It was in the same degree to be avoided, in either aspect. He had no idea of any one companion in his misery, but the one he had driven away. What he would have said to her, or what consolation submitted to receive from her, he never pictured to himself. But he always knew she would have been true to him, if he had suffered her. He always knew she would have loved him better now, than at any other time; he was as certain that it was in her nature, as he was that there was a sky above him; and he sat thinking so, in his loneliness, from hour to hour. Day after day uttered this speech; night after night showed him this knowledge.

It began, beyond all doubt (however slow it advanced for some time), in the receipt of her young husband's letter, and the certainty that she was gone. And yet - so proud he was in his ruin, or so reminiscent of her only as something that might have been his, but was lost beyond redemption - that if he could have heard her voice in an adjoining room, he would not have gone to her. If he could have seen her in the street, and she had done no more than look at him as she had been used to look, he would have passed on with his old cold unforgiving face, and not addressed her, or relaxed it, though his heart should have broken soon afterwards. However turbulent his thoughts, or harsh his anger had been, at first, concerning her marriage, or her husband, that was all past now. He chiefly thought of what might have been, and what was not. What was, was all summed up in this: that she was lost, and he bowed down with sorrow and remorse.

And now he felt that he had had two children born to him in that house, and that between him and the bare wide empty walls there was a tie, mournful, but hard to rend asunder, connected with a double childhood, and a double loss. He had thought to leave the house - knowing he must go, not knowing whither - upon the evening of the day on which this feeling first struck root in his breast; but he resolved to stay another night, and in the night to ramble through the rooms once more.

He came out of his solitude when it was the dead of night, and with a candle in his hand went softly up the stairs. Of all the footmarks there, making them as common as the common street, there was not one, he thought, but had seemed at the time to set itself upon his brain while he had kept close, listening. He looked at their number, and their hurry, and contention - foot treading foot out, and upward track and downward jostling one another - and thought, with absolute dread and wonder, how much he must have suffered during that trial, and what a changed man he had cause to be. He thought, besides, oh was there, somewhere in the world, a light footstep that might have worn out in a moment half those marks! - and bent his head, and wept as he went up.

He almost saw it, going on before. He stopped, looking up towards the skylight; and a figure, childish itself, but carrying a child, and singing as it went, seemed to be there again. Anon, it was the same figure, alone, stopping for an instant, with suspended breath; the bright hair clustering loosely round its tearful face; and looking back at him.

He wandered through the rooms: lately so luxurious; now so bare and dismal and so changed, apparently, even in their shape and size. The press of footsteps was as thick here; and the same consideration of the suffering he had had, perplexed and terrified him. He began to fear that all this intricacy in his brain would drive him mad; and that his thoughts already lost coherence as the footprints did, and were pieced on to one another, with the same trackless involutions, and varieties of indistinct shapes.

He did not so much as know in which of these rooms she had lived, when she was alone. He was glad to leave them, and go wandering higher up. Abundance of associations were here, connected with his false wife, his false friend and servant, his false grounds of pride; but he put them all by now, and only recalled miserably, weakly, fondly, his two children.

Everywhere, the footsteps! They had had no respect for the old room high up, where the little bed had been; he could hardly find a clear space there, to throw himself down, on the floor, against the wall, poor broken man, and let his tears flow as they would. He had shed so many tears here, long ago, that he was less ashamed of his weakness in this place than in any other - perhaps, with that consciousness, had made excuses to himself for coming here. Here, with stooping shoulders, and his chin dropped on his breast, he had come. Here, thrown upon the bare boards, in the dead of night, he wept, alone - a proud man, even then; who, if a kind hand could have been stretched out, or a kind face could have looked in, would have risen up, and turned away, and gone down to his cell.

When the day broke he was shut up in his rooms again. He had meant to go away to-day, but clung to this tie in the house as the last and only thing left to him. He would go to-morrow. To-morrow came. He would go to-morrow. Every night, within the knowledge of no human creature, he came forth, and wandered through the despoiled house like a ghost. Many a morning when the day broke, his altered face, drooping behind the closed blind in his window, imperfectly transparent to the light as yet, pondered on the loss of his two children. It was one child no more. He reunited them in his thoughts, and they were never asunder. Oh, that he could have united them in his past love, and in death, and that one had not been so much worse than dead!

Strong mental agitation and disturbance was no novelty to him, even before his late sufferings. It never is, to obstinate and sullen natures; for they struggle hard to be such. Ground, long undermined, will often fall down in a moment; what was undermined here in so many ways, weakened, and crumbled, little by little, more and more, as the hand moved on the dial.

At last he began to think he need not go at all. He might yet give up what his creditors had spared him (that they had not spared him more, was his own act), and only sever the tie between him and the ruined house, by severing that other link -

It was then that his footfall was audible in the late housekeeper's room, as he walked to and fro; but not audible in its true meaning, or it would have had an appalling sound.

The world was very busy and restless about him. He became aware of that again. It was whispering and babbling. It was never quiet. This, and the intricacy and complication of the footsteps, harassed him to death. Objects began to take a bleared and russet colour in his eyes. Dombey and Son was no more - his children no more. This must be thought of, well, to-morrow.

He thought of it to-morrow; and sitting thinking in his chair, saw in the glass, from time to time, this picture:

A spectral, haggard, wasted likeness of himself, brooded and brooded over the empty fireplace. Now it lifted up its head, examining the lines and hollows in its face; now hung it down again, and brooded afresh. Now it rose and walked about; now passed into the next room, and came back with something from the dressing-table in its breast. Now, it was looking at the bottom of the door, and thinking.

Hush! what? It was thinking that if blood were to trickle that way, and to leak out into the hall, it must be a long time going so far. It would move so stealthily and slowly, creeping on, with here a lazy little pool, and there a start, and then another little pool, that a desperately wounded man could only be discovered through its means, either dead or dying. When it had thought of this a long while, it got up again, and walked to and fro with its hand in its breast. He glanced at it occasionally, very curious to watch its motions, and he marked how wicked and murderous that hand looked.

Now it was thinking again! What was it thinking?

Whether they would tread in the blood when it crept so far, and carry it about the house among those many prints of feet, or even out into the street.

It sat down, with its eyes upon the empty fireplace, and as it lost itself in thought there shone into the room a gleam of light; a ray of sun. It was quite unmindful, and sat thinking. Suddenly it rose, with a terrible face, and that guilty hand grasping what was in its breast. Then it was arrested by a cry - a wild, loud, piercing, loving, rapturous cry - and he only saw his own reflection in the glass, and at his knees, his daughter!

Yes. His daughter! Look at her! Look here! Down upon the ground, clinging to him, calling to him, folding her hands, praying to him.

'Papa! Dearest Papa! Pardon me, forgive me! I have come back to ask forgiveness on my knees. I never can be happy more, without it!'

Unchanged still. Of all the world, unchanged. Raising the same face to his, as on that miserable night. Asking his forgiveness!

'Dear Papa, oh don't look strangely on me! I never meant to leave you. I never thought of it, before or afterwards. I was frightened when I went away, and could not think. Papa, dear, I am changed. I am penitent. I know my fault. I know my duty better now. Papa, don't cast me off, or I shall die!'

He tottered to his chair. He felt her draw his arms about her neck; he felt her put her own round his; he felt her kisses on his face; he felt her wet cheek laid against his own; he felt - oh, how deeply! - all that he had done.

Upon the breast that he had bruised, against the heart that he had almost broken, she laid his face, now covered with his hands, and said, sobbing:

'Papa, love, I am a mother. I have a child who will soon call Walter by the name by which I call you. When it was born, and when I knew how much I loved it, I knew what I had done in leaving you. Forgive me, dear Papa! oh say God bless me, and my little child!'

He would have said it, if he could. He would have raised his hands and besought her for pardon, but she caught them in her own, and put them down, hurriedly.

'My little child was born at sea, Papa I prayed to God (and so did Walter for me) to spare me, that I might come home. The moment I could land, I came back to you. Never let us be parted any more, Papa. Never let us be parted any more!'

His head, now grey, was encircled by her arm; and he groaned to think that never, never, had it rested so before.

'You will come home with me, Papa, and see my baby. A boy, Papa. His name is Paul. I think - I hope - he's like - '

Her tears stopped her.

'Dear Papa, for the sake of my child, for the sake of the name we have given him, for my sake, pardon Walter. He is so kind and tender to me. I am so happy with him. It was not his fault that we were married. It was mine. I loved him so much.'

She clung closer to him, more endearing and more earnest.

'He is the darling of my heart, Papa I would die for him. He will love and honour you as I will. We will teach our little child to love and honour you; and we will tell him, when he can understand, that you had a son of that name once, and that he died, and you were very sorry; but that he is gone to Heaven, where we all hope to see him when our time for resting comes. Kiss me, Papa, as a promise that you will be reconciled to Walter - to my dearest husband - to the father of the little child who taught me to come back, Papa Who taught me to come back!'

As she clung closer to him, in another burst of tears, he kissed her on her lips, and, lifting up his eyes, said, 'Oh my God, forgive me, for I need it very much!'

With that he dropped his head again, lamenting over and caressing her, and there was not a sound in all the house for a long, long time; they remaining clasped in one another's arms, in the glorious sunshine that had crept in with Florence.

He dressed himself for going out, with a docile submission to her entreaty; and walking with a feeble gait, and looking back, with a tremble, at the room in which he had been so long shut up, and where he had seen the picture in the glass, passed out with her into the hall. Florence, hardly glancing round her, lest she should remind him freshly of their last parting - for their feet were on the very stones where he had struck her in his madness - and keeping close to him, with her eyes upon his face, and his arm about her, led him out to a coach that was waiting at the door, and carried him away.

Then, Miss Tox and Polly came out of their concealment, and exulted tearfully. And then they packed his clothes, and books, and so forth, with great care; and consigned them in due course to certain persons sent by Florence, in the evening, to fetch them. And then they took a last cup of tea in the lonely house.

'And so Dombey and Son, as I observed upon a certain sad occasion,' said Miss Tox, winding up a host of recollections, 'is indeed a daughter, Polly, after all.'

'And a good one!' exclaimed Polly.

'You are right,' said Miss Tox; 'and it's a credit to you, Polly, that you were always her friend when she was a little child. You were her friend long before I was, Polly,' said Miss Tox; 'and you're a good creature. Robin!'

Miss Tox addressed herself to a bullet-headed young man, who appeared to be in but indifferent circumstances, and in depressed spirits, and who was sitting in a remote corner. Rising, he disclosed to view the form and features of the Grinder.

'Robin,' said Miss Tox, 'I have just observed to your mother, as you may have heard, that she is a good creature.'

'And so she is, Miss,' quoth the Grinder, with some feeling.

'Very well, Robin,' said Miss Tox, 'I am glad to hear you say so. Now, Robin, as I am going to give you a trial, at your urgent request, as my domestic, with a view to your restoration to respectability, I will take this impressive occasion of remarking that I hope you will never forget that you have, and have always had, a good mother, and that you will endeavour so to conduct yourself as to be a comfort to her.'

'Upon my soul I will, Miss,' returned the Grinder. 'I have come through a good deal, and my intentions is now as straightfor'ard, Miss, as a cove's - '

'I must get you to break yourself of that word, Robin, if you Please,' interposed Miss Tox, politely.

'If you please, Miss, as a chap's - '

'Thankee, Robin, no,' returned Miss Tox, 'I should prefer individual.'

'As a indiwiddle's,' said the Grinder.

'Much better,' remarked Miss Tox, complacently; 'infinitely more expressive!'

' - can be,' pursued Rob. 'If I hadn't been and got made a Grinder on, Miss and Mother, which was a most unfortunate circumstance for a young co - indiwiddle.'

'Very good indeed,' observed Miss Tox, approvingly.

' - and if I hadn't been led away by birds, and then fallen into a bad service,' said the Grinder, 'I hope I might have done better. But it's never too late for a - '

'Indi - ' suggested Miss Tox.

' - widdle,' said the Grinder, 'to mend; and I hope to mend, Miss, with your kind trial; and wishing, Mother, my love to father, and brothers and sisters, and saying of it.'

'I am very glad indeed to hear it,' observed Miss Tox. 'Will you take a little bread and butter, and a cup of tea, before we go, Robin?'

'Thankee, Miss,' returned the Grinder; who immediately began to use his own personal grinders in a most remarkable manner, as if he had been on very short allowance for a considerable period.

Miss Tox, being, in good time, bonneted and shawled, and Polly too, Rob hugged his mother, and followed his new mistress away; so much to the hopeful admiration of Polly, that something in her eyes made luminous rings round the gas-lamps as she looked after him. Polly then put out her light, locked the house-door, delivered the key at an agent's hard by, and went home as fast as she could go; rejoicing in the shrill delight that her unexpected arrival would occasion there. The great house, dumb as to all that had been suffered in it, and the changes it had witnessed, stood frowning like a dark mute on the street; baulking any nearer inquiries with the staring announcement that the lease of this desirable Family Mansion was to be disposed of.