

## Chapter LXII - Final

A bottle that has been long excluded from the light of day, and is hoary with dust and cobwebs, has been brought into the sunshine; and the golden wine within it sheds a lustre on the table.

It is the last bottle of the old Madiera.

'You are quite right, Mr Gills,' says Mr Dombey. 'This is a very rare and most delicious wine.'

The Captain, who is of the party, beams with joy. There is a very halo of delight round his glowing forehead.

'We always promised ourselves, Sir,' observes Mr Gills, 'Ned and myself, I mean - '

Mr Dombey nods at the Captain, who shines more and more with speechless gratification.

'-that we would drink this, one day or other, to Walter safe at home: though such a home we never thought of. If you don't object to our old whim, Sir, let us devote this first glass to Walter and his wife.'

'To Walter and his wife!' says Mr Dombey. 'Florence, my child' - and turns to kiss her.

'To Walter and his wife!' says Mr Toots.

'To Wal'r and his wife!' exclaims the Captain. 'Hooroar!' and the Captain exhibiting a strong desire to clink his glass against some other glass, Mr Dombey, with a ready hand, holds out his. The others follow; and there is a blithe and merry ringing, as of a little peal of marriage bells.

Other buried wine grows older, as the old Madeira did in its time; and dust and cobwebs thicken on the bottles.

Mr Dombey is a white-haired gentleman, whose face bears heavy marks of care and suffering; but they are traces of a storm that has passed on for ever, and left a clear evening in its track.

Ambitious projects trouble him no more. His only pride is in his daughter and her husband. He has a silent, thoughtful, quiet manner, and is always with his daughter. Miss Tox is not infrequently of the family party, and is quite devoted to it, and a great favourite. Her admiration of her once stately patron is, and has been ever since the

morning of her shock in Princess's Place, platonic, but not weakened in the least.

Nothing has drifted to him from the wreck of his fortunes, but a certain annual sum that comes he knows not how, with an earnest entreaty that he will not seek to discover, and with the assurance that it is a debt, and an act of reparation. He has consulted with his old clerk about this, who is clear it may be honourably accepted, and has no doubt it arises out of some forgotten transaction in the times of the old House.

That hazel-eyed bachelor, a bachelor no more, is married now, and to the sister of the grey-haired Junior. He visits his old chief sometimes, but seldom. There is a reason in the greyhaired Junior's history, and yet a stronger reason in his name, why he should keep retired from his old employer; and as he lives with his sister and her husband, they participate in that retirement. Walter sees them sometimes - Florence too - and the pleasant house resounds with profound duets arranged for the Piano-Forte and Violoncello, and with the labours of Harmonious Blacksmiths.

And how goes the wooden Midshipman in these changed days? Why, here he still is, right leg foremost, hard at work upon the hackney coaches, and more on the alert than ever, being newly painted from his cocked hat to his buckled shoes; and up above him, in golden characters, these names shine refulgent, GILLS AND CUTTLE.

Not another stroke of business does the Midshipman achieve beyond his usual easy trade. But they do say, in a circuit of some half-mile round the blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market, that some of Mr Gills's old investments are coming out wonderfully well; and that instead of being behind the time in those respects, as he supposed, he was, in truth, a little before it, and had to wait the fulness of the time and the design. The whisper is that Mr Gills's money has begun to turn itself, and that it is turning itself over and over pretty briskly. Certain it is that, standing at his shop-door, in his coffee-coloured suit, with his chronometer in his pocket, and his spectacles on his forehead, he don't appear to break his heart at customers not coming, but looks very jovial and contented, though full as misty as of yore.

As to his partner, Captain Cuttle, there is a fiction of a business in the Captain's mind which is better than any reality. The Captain is as satisfied of the Midshipman's importance to the commerce and navigation of the country, as he could possibly be, if no ship left the Port of London without the Midshipman's assistance. His delight in his own name over the door, is inexhaustible. He crosses the street, twenty times a day, to look at it from the other side of the way; and invariably says, on these occasions, 'Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad, if your

mother could ha' know'd as you would ever be a man o' science, the good old creetur would ha' been took aback in-deed!

But here is Mr Toots descending on the Midshipman with violent rapidity, and Mr Toots's face is very red as he bursts into the little parlour.

'Captain Gills,' says Mr Toots, 'and Mr Sols, I am happy to inform you that Mrs Toots has had an increase to her family.

'And it does her credit!' cries the Captain.

'I give you joy, Mr Toots!' says old Sol.

'Thank'ee,' chuckles Mr Toots, 'I'm very much obliged to you. I knew that you'd be glad to hear, and so I came down myself. We're positively getting on, you know. There's Florence, and Susan, and now here's another little stranger.'

'A female stranger?' inquires the Captain.

'Yes, Captain Gills,' says Mr Toots, 'and I'm glad of it. The oftener we can repeat that most extraordinary woman, my opinion is, the better!'

'Stand by!' says the Captain, turning to the old case-bottle with no throat - for it is evening, and the Midshipman's usual moderate provision of pipes and glasses is on the board. 'Here's to her, and may she have ever so many more!'

'Thank'ee, Captain Gills,' says the delighted Mr Toots. 'I echo the sentiment. If you'll allow me, as my so doing cannot be unpleasant to anybody, under the circumstances, I think I'll take a pipe.'

Mr Toots begins to smoke, accordingly, and in the openness of his heart is very loquacious.

'Of all the remarkable instances that that delightful woman has given of her excellent sense, Captain Gills and Mr Sols,' said Mr Toots, 'I think none is more remarkable than the perfection with which she has understood my devotion to Miss Dombey.'

Both his auditors assent.

'Because you know,' says Mr Toots, 'I have never changed my sentiments towards Miss Dombey. They are the same as ever. She is the same bright vision to me, at present, that she was before I made Walters's acquaintance. When Mrs Toots and myself first began to talk of - in short, of the tender passion, you know, Captain Gills.'

'Ay, ay, my lad,' says the Captain, 'as makes us all slue round - for which you'll overhaul the book - '

'I shall certainly do so, Captain Gills,' says Mr Toots, with great earnestness; 'when we first began to mention such subjects, I explained that I was what you may call a Blighted Flower, you know.'

The Captain approves of this figure greatly; and murmurs that no flower as blows, is like the rose.

'But Lord bless me,' pursues Mr Toots, 'she was as entirely conscious of the state of my feelings as I was myself. There was nothing I could tell her. She was the only person who could have stood between me and the silent Tomb, and she did it, in a manner to command my everlasting admiration. She knows that there's nobody in the world I look up to, as I do to Miss Dombey. Knows that there's nothing on earth I wouldn't do for Miss Dombey. She knows that I consider Miss Dombey the most beautiful, the most amiable, the most angelic of her sex. What is her observation upon that? The perfection of sense. 'My dear, you're right. I think so too.'

'And so do I!' says the Captain.

'So do I,' says Sol Gills.

'Then,' resumes Mr Toots, after some contemplative pulling at his pipe, during which his visage has expressed the most contented reflection, 'what an observant woman my wife is! What sagacity she possesses! What remarks she makes! It was only last night, when we were sitting in the enjoyment of connubial bliss - which, upon my word and honour, is a feeble term to express my feelings in the society of my wife - that she said how remarkable it was to consider the present position of our friend Walters. 'Here,' observes my wife, 'he is, released from sea-going, after that first long voyage with his young bride' - as you know he was, Mr Sols.'

'Quite true,' says the old Instrument-maker, rubbing his hands.

'Here he is,' says my wife, 'released from that, immediately; appointed by the same establishment to a post of great trust and confidence at home; showing himself again worthy; mounting up the ladder with the greatest expedition; beloved by everybody; assisted by his uncle at the very best possible time of his fortunes' - which I think is the case, Mr Sols? My wife is always correct.'

'Why yes, yes - some of our lost ships, freighted with gold, have come home, truly,' returns old Sol, laughing. 'Small craft, Mr Toots, but serviceable to my boy!'

'Exactly so,' says Mr Toots. 'You'll never find my wife wrong. 'Here he is,' says that most remarkable woman, 'so situated, - and what follows? What follows?' observed Mrs Toots. Now pray remark, Captain Gills, and Mr Sols, the depth of my wife's penetration. 'Why that, under the very eye of Mr Dombey, there is a foundation going on, upon which a - an Edifice;' that was Mrs Toots's word,' says Mr Toots exultingly, "is gradually rising, perhaps to equal, perhaps excel, that of which he was once the head, and the small beginnings of which (a common fault, but a bad one, Mrs Toots said) escaped his memory. Thus,' said my wife, 'from his daughter, after all, another Dombey and Son will ascend' - no 'rise;' that was Mrs Toots's word - 'triumphant!'"

Mr Toots, with the assistance of his pipe - which he is extremely glad to devote to oratorical purposes, as its proper use affects him with a very uncomfortable sensation - does such grand justice to this prophetic sentence of his wife's, that the Captain, throwing away his glazed hat in a state of the greatest excitement, cries:

'Sol Gills, you man of science and my ould pardner, what did I tell Wal'r to overhaul on that there night when he first took to business? Was it this here quotation, 'Turn again Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and when you are old you will never depart from it'. Was it them words, Sol Gills?'

'It certainly was, Ned,' replied the old Instrument-maker. 'I remember well.'

'Then I tell you what,' says the Captain, leaning back in his chair, and composing his chest for a prodigious roar. 'I'll give you Lovely Peg right through; and stand by, both on you, for the chorus!'

Buried wine grows older, as the old Madeira did, in its time; and dust and cobwebs thicken on the bottles.

Autumn days are shining, and on the sea-beach there are often a young lady, and a white-haired gentleman. With them, or near them, are two children: boy and girl. And an old dog is generally in their company.

The white-haired gentleman walks with the little boy, talks with him, helps him in his play, attends upon him, watches him as if he were the object of his life. If he be thoughtful, the white-haired gentleman is thoughtful too; and sometimes when the child is sitting by his side, and looks up in his face, asking him questions, he takes the tiny hand in his, and holding it, forgets to answer. Then the child says:

'What, grandpa! Am I so like my poor little Uncle again?' 'Yes, Paul. But he was weak, and you are very strong.'

'Oh yes, I am very strong.'

'And he lay on a little bed beside the sea, and you can run about.'

And so they range away again, busily, for the white-haired gentleman likes best to see the child free and stirring; and as they go about together, the story of the bond between them goes about, and follows them.

But no one, except Florence, knows the measure of the white-haired gentleman's affection for the girl. That story never goes about. The child herself almost wonders at a certain secrecy he keeps in it. He hoards her in his heart. He cannot bear to see a cloud upon her face. He cannot bear to see her sit apart. He fancies that she feels a slight, when there is none. He steals away to look at her, in her sleep. It pleases him to have her come, and wake him in the morning. He is fondest of her and most loving to her, when there is no creature by. The child says then, sometimes:

'Dear grandpapa, why do you cry when you kiss me?'

He only answers, 'Little Florence! little Florence!' and smooths away the curls that shade her earnest eyes.

The voices in the waves speak low to him of Florence, day and night - plainest when he, his blooming daughter, and her husband, beside them in the evening, or sit at an open window, listening to their roar. They speak to him of Florence and his altered heart; of Florence and their ceaseless murmuring to her of the love, eternal and illimitable, extending still, beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away.

Never from the mighty sea may voices rise too late, to come between us and the unseen region on the other shore! Better, far better, that they whispered of that region in our childish ears, and the swift river hurried us away!

**The End**