

## Chapter XLII - Something Right Somewhere

To be in the halting state of Mr Henry Gowan; to have left one of two powers in disgust; to want the necessary qualifications for finding promotion with another, and to be loitering moodily about on neutral ground, cursing both; is to be in a situation unwholesome for the mind, which time is not likely to improve. The worst class of sum worked in the every-day world is cyphered by the diseased arithmeticians who are always in the rule of Subtraction as to the merits and successes of others, and never in Addition as to their own.

The habit, too, of seeking some sort of recompense in the discontented boast of being disappointed, is a habit fraught with degeneracy. A certain idle carelessness and recklessness of consistency soon comes of it. To bring deserving things down by setting undeserving things up is one of its perverted delights; and there is no playing fast and loose with the truth, in any game, without growing the worse for it.

In his expressed opinions of all performances in the Art of painting that were completely destitute of merit, Gowan was the most liberal fellow on earth. He would declare such a man to have more power in his little finger (provided he had none), than such another had (provided he had much) in his whole mind and body. If the objection were taken that the thing commended was trash, he would reply, on behalf of his art, 'My good fellow, what do we all turn out but trash? I turn out nothing else, and I make you a present of the confession.'

To make a vaunt of being poor was another of the incidents of his splenetic state, though this may have had the design in it of showing that he ought to be rich; just as he would publicly laud and decry the Barnacles, lest it should be forgotten that he belonged to the family. Howbeit, these two subjects were very often on his lips; and he managed them so well that he might have praised himself by the month together, and not have made himself out half so important a man as he did by his light disparagement of his claims on anybody's consideration.

Out of this same airy talk of his, it always soon came to be understood, wherever he and his wife went, that he had married against the wishes of his exalted relations, and had had much ado to prevail on them to countenance her. He never made the representation, on the contrary seemed to laugh the idea to scorn; but it did happen that, with all his pains to depreciate himself, he was always in the superior position. From the days of their honeymoon, Minnie Gowan felt sensible of being usually regarded as the wife of a man who had made a descent in marrying her, but whose chivalrous love for her had cancelled that inequality.

To Venice they had been accompanied by Monsieur Blandois of Paris, and at Venice Monsieur Blandois of Paris was very much in the society of Gowan. When they had first met this gallant gentleman at Geneva, Gowan had been undecided whether to kick him or encourage him; and had remained for about four-and-twenty hours, so troubled to settle the point to his satisfaction, that he had thought of tossing up a five-franc piece on the terms, 'Tails, kick; heads, encourage,' and abiding by the voice of the oracle. It chanced, however, that his wife expressed a dislike to the engaging Blandois, and that the balance of feeling in the hotel was against him. Upon it, Gowan resolved to encourage him.

Why this perversity, if it were not in a generous fit? - which it was not. Why should Gowan, very much the superior of Blandois of Paris, and very well able to pull that prepossessing gentleman to pieces and find out the stuff he was made of, take up with such a man? In the first place, he opposed the first separate wish he observed in his wife, because her father had paid his debts and it was desirable to take an early opportunity of asserting his independence. In the second place, he opposed the prevalent feeling, because with many capacities of being otherwise, he was an ill-conditioned man. He found a pleasure in declaring that a courtier with the refined manners of Blandois ought to rise to the greatest distinction in any polished country. He found a pleasure in setting up Blandois as the type of elegance, and making him a satire upon others who piqued themselves on personal graces. He seriously protested that the bow of Blandois was perfect, that the address of Blandois was irresistible, and that the picturesque ease of Blandois would be cheaply purchased (if it were not a gift, and unpurchasable) for a hundred thousand francs. That exaggeration in the manner of the man which has been noticed as appertaining to him and to every such man, whatever his original breeding, as certainly as the sun belongs to this system, was acceptable to Gowan as a caricature, which he found it a humorous resource to have at hand for the ridiculing of numbers of people who necessarily did more or less of what Blandois overdid. Thus he had taken up with him; and thus, negligently strengthening these inclinations with habit, and idly deriving some amusement from his talk, he had glided into a way of having him for a companion. This, though he supposed him to live by his wits at play-tables and the like; though he suspected him to be a coward, while he himself was daring and courageous; though he thoroughly knew him to be disliked by Minnie; and though he cared so little for him, after all, that if he had given her any tangible personal cause to regard him with aversion, he would have had no compunction whatever in flinging him out of the highest window in Venice into the deepest water of the city.

Little Dorrit would have been glad to make her visit to Mrs Gowan, alone; but as Fanny, who had not yet recovered from her Uncle's

protest, though it was four-and-twenty hours of age, pressingly offered her company, the two sisters stepped together into one of the gondolas under Mr Dorrit's window, and, with the courier in attendance, were taken in high state to Mrs Gowan's lodging. In truth, their state was rather too high for the lodging, which was, as Fanny complained, 'fearfully out of the way,' and which took them through a complexity of narrow streets of water, which the same lady disparaged as 'mere ditches.'

The house, on a little desert island, looked as if it had broken away from somewhere else, and had floated by chance into its present anchorage in company with a vine almost as much in want of training as the poor wretches who were lying under its leaves. The features of the surrounding picture were, a church with hoarding and scaffolding about it, which had been under suppositious repair so long that the means of repair looked a hundred years old, and had themselves fallen into decay; a quantity of washed linen, spread to dry in the sun; a number of houses at odds with one another and grotesquely out of the perpendicular, like rotten pre-Adamite cheeses cut into fantastic shapes and full of mites; and a feverish bewilderment of windows, with their lattice-blinds all hanging askew, and something draggled and dirty dangling out of most of them.

On the first-floor of the house was a Bank - a surprising experience for any gentleman of commercial pursuits bringing laws for all mankind from a British city - where two spare clerks, like dried dragoons, in green velvet caps adorned with golden tassels, stood, bearded, behind a small counter in a small room, containing no other visible objects than an empty iron-safe with the door open, a jug of water, and a papering of garland of roses; but who, on lawful requisition, by merely dipping their hands out of sight, could produce exhaustless mounds of five-franc pieces. Below the Bank was a suite of three or four rooms with barred windows, which had the appearance of a jail for criminal rats. Above the Bank was Mrs Gowan's residence.

Notwithstanding that its walls were blotched, as if missionary maps were bursting out of them to impart geographical knowledge; notwithstanding that its weird furniture was forlornly faded and musty, and that the prevailing Venetian odour of bilge water and an ebb tide on a weedy shore was very strong; the place was better within, than it promised. The door was opened by a smiling man like a reformed assassin - a temporary servant - who ushered them into the room where Mrs Gowan sat, with the announcement that two beautiful English ladies were come to see the mistress.

Mrs Gowan, who was engaged in needlework, put her work aside in a covered basket, and rose, a little hurriedly. Miss Fanny was

excessively courteous to her, and said the usual nothings with the skill of a veteran.

'Papa was extremely sorry,' proceeded Fanny, 'to be engaged to-day (he is so much engaged here, our acquaintance being so wretchedly large!); and particularly requested me to bring his card for Mr Gowan. That I may be sure to acquit myself of a commission which he impressed upon me at least a dozen times, allow me to relieve my conscience by placing it on the table at once.'

Which she did with veteran ease.

'We have been,' said Fanny, 'charmed to understand that you know the Merdles. We hope it may be another means of bringing us together.'

'They are friends,' said Mrs Gowan, 'of Mr Gowan's family. I have not yet had the pleasure of a personal introduction to Mrs Merdle, but I suppose I shall be presented to her at Rome.'

'Indeed?' returned Fanny, with an appearance of amiably quenching her own superiority. 'I think you'll like her.'

'You know her very well?'

'Why, you see,' said Fanny, with a frank action of her pretty shoulders, 'in London one knows every one. We met her on our way here, and, to say the truth, papa was at first rather cross with her for taking one of the rooms that our people had ordered for us.'

However, of course, that soon blew over, and we were all good friends again.'

Although the visit had as yet given Little Dorrit no opportunity of conversing with Mrs Gowan, there was a silent understanding between them, which did as well. She looked at Mrs Gowan with keen and unabated interest; the sound of her voice was thrilling to her; nothing that was near her, or about her, or at all concerned her, escaped Little Dorrit. She was quicker to perceive the slightest matter here, than in any other case - but one.

'You have been quite well,' she now said, 'since that night?'

'Quite, my dear. And you?' 'Oh! I am always well,' said Little Dorrit, timidly. 'I - yes, thank you.'

There was no reason for her faltering and breaking off, other than that Mrs Gowan had touched her hand in speaking to her, and their looks

had met. Something thoughtfully apprehensive in the large, soft eyes, had checked Little Dorrit in an instant.

'You don't know that you are a favourite of my husband's, and that I am almost bound to be jealous of you?' said Mrs Gowan.

Little Dorrit, blushing, shook her head.

'He will tell you, if he tells you what he tells me, that you are quieter and quicker of resource than any one he ever saw.'

'He speaks far too well of me,' said Little Dorrit.

'I doubt that; but I don't at all doubt that I must tell him you are here. I should never be forgiven, if I were to let you - and Miss Dorrit - go, without doing so. May I? You can excuse the disorder and discomfort of a painter's studio?'

The inquiries were addressed to Miss Fanny, who graciously replied that she would be beyond anything interested and enchanted. Mrs Gowan went to a door, looked in beyond it, and came back. 'Do Henry the favour to come in,' said she, 'I knew he would be pleased!'

The first object that confronted Little Dorrit, entering first, was Blandois of Paris in a great cloak and a furtive slouched hat, standing on a throne platform in a corner, as he had stood on the Great Saint Bernard, when the warning arms seemed to be all pointing up at him. She recoiled from this figure, as it smiled at her.

'Don't be alarmed,' said Gowan, coming from his easel behind the door. 'It's only Blandois. He is doing duty as a model to-day. I am making a study of him. It saves me money to turn him to some use. We poor painters have none to spare.'

Blandois of Paris pulled off his slouched hat, and saluted the ladies without coming out of his corner.

'A thousand pardons!' said he. 'But the Professore here is so inexorable with me, that I am afraid to stir.'

'Don't stir, then,' said Gowan coolly, as the sisters approached the easel. 'Let the ladies at least see the original of the daub, that they may know what it's meant for. There he stands, you see. A bravo waiting for his prey, a distinguished noble waiting to save his country, the common enemy waiting to do somebody a bad turn, an angelic messenger waiting to do somebody a good turn - whatever you think he looks most like!' 'Say, Professore Mio, a poor gentleman waiting to do homage to elegance and beauty,' remarked Blandois.

'Or say, Cattivo Soggetto Mio,' returned Gowan, touching the painted face with his brush in the part where the real face had moved, 'a murderer after the fact. Show that white hand of yours, Blandois. Put it outside the cloak. Keep it still.'

Blandois' hand was unsteady; but he laughed, and that would naturally shake it.

'He was formerly in some scuffle with another murderer, or with a victim, you observe,' said Gowan, putting in the markings of the hand with a quick, impatient, unskilful touch, 'and these are the tokens of it. Outside the cloak, man! - Corpo di San Marco, what are you thinking of?'

Blandois of Paris shook with a laugh again, so that his hand shook more; now he raised it to twist his moustache, which had a damp appearance; and now he stood in the required position, with a little new swagger.

His face was so directed in reference to the spot where Little Dorrit stood by the easel, that throughout he looked at her. Once attracted by his peculiar eyes, she could not remove her own, and they had looked at each other all the time. She trembled now; Gowan, feeling it, and supposing her to be alarmed by the large dog beside him, whose head she caressed in her hand, and who had just uttered a low growl, glanced at her to say, 'He won't hurt you, Miss Dorrit.'

'I am not afraid of him,' she returned in the same breath; 'but will you look at him?'

In a moment Gowan had thrown down his brush, and seized the dog with both hands by the collar.

'Blandois! How can you be such a fool as to provoke him! By Heaven, and the other place too, he'll tear you to bits! Lie down!

Lion! Do you hear my voice, you rebel!

'The great dog, regardless of being half-choked by his collar, was obdurately pulling with his dead weight against his master, resolved to get across the room. He had been crouching for a spring at the moment when his master caught him.

'Lion! Lion!' He was up on his hind legs, and it was a wrestle between master and dog. 'Get back! Down, Lion! Get out of his sight, Blandois! What devil have you conjured into the dog?'

'I have done nothing to him.'

'Get out of his sight or I can't hold the wild beast! Get out of the room! By my soul, he'll kill you!'

The dog, with a ferocious bark, made one other struggle as Blandois vanished; then, in the moment of the dog's submission, the master, little less angry than the dog, felled him with a blow on the head, and standing over him, struck him many times severely with the heel of his boot, so that his mouth was presently bloody.

'Now get you into that corner and lie down,' said Gowan, 'or I'll take you out and shoot you.'

Lion did as he was ordered, and lay down licking his mouth and chest. Lion's master stopped for a moment to take breath, and then, recovering his usual coolness of manner, turned to speak to his frightened wife and her visitors. Probably the whole occurrence had not occupied two minutes.

'Come, come, Minnie! You know he is always good-humoured and tractable. Blandois must have irritated him, - made faces at him. The dog has his likings and dislikings, and Blandois is no great favourite of his; but I am sure you will give him a character, Minnie, for never having been like this before.'

Minnie was too much disturbed to say anything connected in reply; Little Dorrit was already occupied in soothing her; Fanny, who had cried out twice or thrice, held Gowan's arm for protection; Lion, deeply ashamed of having caused them this alarm, came trailing himself along the ground to the feet of his mistress.

'You furious brute,' said Gowan, striking him with his foot again. 'You shall do penance for this.' And he struck him again, and yet again.

'O, pray don't punish him any more,' cried Little Dorrit. 'Don't hurt him. See how gentle he is!' At her entreaty, Gowan spared him; and he deserved her intercession, for truly he was as submissive, and as sorry, and as wretched as a dog could be.

It was not easy to recover this shock and make the visit unrestrained, even though Fanny had not been, under the best of circumstances, the least trifle in the way. In such further communication as passed among them before the sisters took their departure, Little Dorrit fancied it was revealed to her that Mr Gowan treated his wife, even in his very fondness, too much like a beautiful child. He seemed so unsuspecting of the depths of feeling which she knew must lie below that surface, that she doubted if there could be any such depths in himself. She wondered whether his want of earnestness might be the natural result of his want of such qualities, and whether it was with

people as with ships, that, in too shallow and rocky waters, their anchors had no hold, and they drifted anywhere.

He attended them down the staircase, jocosely apologising for the poor quarters to which such poor fellows as himself were limited, and remarking that when the high and mighty Barnacles, his relatives, who would be dreadfully ashamed of them, presented him with better, he would live in better to oblige them. At the water's edge they were saluted by Blandois, who looked white enough after his late adventure, but who made very light of it notwithstanding, - laughing at the mention of Lion.

Leaving the two together under the scrap of vine upon the causeway, Gowan idly scattering the leaves from it into the water, and Blandois lighting a cigarette, the sisters were paddled away in state as they had come. They had not glided on for many minutes, when Little Dorrit became aware that Fanny was more showy in manner than the occasion appeared to require, and, looking about for the cause through the window and through the open door, saw another gondola evidently in waiting on them.

As this gondola attended their progress in various artful ways; sometimes shooting on a-head, and stopping to let them pass; sometimes, when the way was broad enough, skimming along side by side with them; and sometimes following close astern; and as Fanny gradually made no disguise that she was playing off graces upon somebody within it, of whom she at the same time feigned to be unconscious; Little Dorrit at length asked who it was?

To which Fanny made the short answer, 'That gaby.'

'Who?' said Little Dorrit.

'My dear child,' returned Fanny (in a tone suggesting that before her Uncle's protest she might have said, You little fool, instead), 'how slow you are! Young Sparkler.'

She lowered the window on her side, and, leaning back and resting her elbow on it negligently, fanned herself with a rich Spanish fan of black and gold. The attendant gondola, having skimmed forward again, with some swift trace of an eye in the

window, Fanny laughed coquettishly and said, 'Did you ever see such a fool, my love?'

'Do you think he means to follow you all the way?' asked Little Dorrit.



'My precious child,' returned Fanny, 'I can't possibly answer for what an idiot in a state of desperation may do, but I should think it highly probable. It's not such an enormous distance. All Venice would scarcely be that, I imagine, if he's dying for a glimpse of me.'

'And is he?' asked Little Dorrit in perfect simplicity.

'Well, my love, that really is an awkward question for me to answer,' said her sister. 'I believe he is. You had better ask Edward. He tells Edward he is, I believe. I understand he makes a perfect spectacle of himself at the Casino, and that sort of places, by going on about me. But you had better ask Edward if you want to know.'

'I wonder he doesn't call,' said Little Dorrit after thinking a moment.

'My dear Amy, your wonder will soon cease, if I am rightly informed. I should not be at all surprised if he called to-day. The creature has only been waiting to get his courage up, I suspect.'

'Will you see him?'

'Indeed, my darling,' said Fanny, 'that's just as it may happen. Here he is again. Look at him. O, you simpleton!'

Mr Sparkler had, undeniably, a weak appearance; with his eye in the window like a knot in the glass, and no reason on earth for stopping his bark suddenly, except the real reason.

'When you asked me if I will see him, my dear,' said Fanny, almost as well composed in the graceful indifference of her attitude as Mrs Merdle herself, 'what do you mean?' 'I mean,' said Little Dorrit - 'I think I rather mean what do you mean, dear Fanny?'

Fanny laughed again, in a manner at once condescending, arch, and affable; and said, putting her arm round her sister in a playfully affectionate way:

'Now tell me, my little pet. When we saw that woman at Martigny, how did you think she carried it off? Did you see what she decided on in a moment?'

'No, Fanny.'

'Then I'll tell you, Amy. She settled with herself, now I'll never refer to that meeting under such different circumstances, and I'll never pretend to have any idea that these are the same girls. That's her way out of a difficulty. What did I tell you when we came away from Harley Street that time? She is as insolent and false as any woman in the

world. But in the first capacity, my love, she may find people who can match her.'

A significant turn of the Spanish fan towards Fanny's bosom, indicated with great expression where one of these people was to be found.

'Not only that,' pursued Fanny, 'but she gives the same charge to Young Sparkler; and doesn't let him come after me until she has got it thoroughly into his most ridiculous of all ridiculous noddles (for one really can't call it a head), that he is to pretend to have been first struck with me in that Inn Yard.'

'Why?' asked Little Dorrit.

'Why? Good gracious, my love!' (again very much in the tone of You stupid little creature) 'how can you ask? Don't you see that I may have become a rather desirable match for a noddle? And don't you see that she puts the deception upon us, and makes a pretence, while she shifts it from her own shoulders (very good shoulders they are too, I must say),' observed Miss Fanny, glancing complacently at herself, 'of considering our feelings?'

'But we can always go back to the plain truth.'

'Yes, but if you please we won't,' retorted Fanny. 'No; I am not going to have that done, Amy. The pretext is none of mine; it's hers, and she shall have enough of it.'

In the triumphant exaltation of her feelings, Miss Fanny, using her Spanish fan with one hand, squeezed her sister's waist with the other, as if she were crushing Mrs Merdle.

'No,' repeated Fanny. 'She shall find me go her way. She took it, and I'll follow it. And, with the blessing of fate and fortune, I'll go on improving that woman's acquaintance until I have given her maid, before her eyes, things from my dressmaker's ten times as handsome and expensive as she once gave me from hers!'

Little Dorrit was silent; sensible that she was not to be heard on any question affecting the family dignity, and unwilling to lose to no purpose her sister's newly and unexpectedly restored favour. She could not concur, but she was silent. Fanny well knew what she was thinking of; so well, that she soon asked her.

Her reply was, 'Do you mean to encourage Mr Sparkler, Fanny?'

'Encourage him, my dear?' said her sister, smiling contemptuously, 'that depends upon what you call encourage. No, I don't mean to encourage him. But I'll make a slave of him.'

Little Dorrit glanced seriously and doubtfully in her face, but Fanny was not to be so brought to a check. She furled her fan of black and gold, and used it to tap her sister's nose; with the air of a proud beauty and a great spirit, who toyed with and playfully instructed a homely companion.

'I shall make him fetch and carry, my dear, and I shall make him subject to me. And if I don't make his mother subject to me, too, it shall not be my fault.'

'Do you think - dear Fanny, don't be offended, we are so comfortable together now - that you can quite see the end of that course?'

'I can't say I have so much as looked for it yet, my dear,' answered Fanny, with supreme indifference; 'all in good time. Such are my intentions. And really they have taken me so long to develop, that here we are at home. And Young Sparkler at the door, inquiring who is within. By the merest accident, of course!'

In effect, the swain was standing up in his gondola, card-case in hand, affecting to put the question to a servant. This conjunction of circumstances led to his immediately afterwards presenting himself before the young ladies in a posture, which in ancient times would not have been considered one of favourable augury for his suit; since the gondoliers of the young ladies, having been put to some inconvenience by the chase, so neatly brought their own boat in the gentlest collision with the bark of Mr Sparkler, as to tip that gentleman over like a larger species of ninepin, and cause him to exhibit the soles of his shoes to the object of his dearest wishes: while the nobler portions of his anatomy struggled at the bottom of his boat in the arms of one of his men.

However, as Miss Fanny called out with much concern, Was the gentleman hurt, Mr Sparkler rose more restored than might have been expected, and stammered for himself with blushes, 'Not at all so.' Miss Fanny had no recollection of having ever seen him before, and was passing on, with a distant inclination of her head, when he announced himself by name. Even then she was in a difficulty from being unable to call it to mind, until he explained that he had had the honour of seeing her at Martigny. Then she remembered him, and hoped his lady-mother was well.

'Thank you,' stammered Mr Sparkler, 'she's uncommonly well - at least, poorly.'

'In Venice?' said Miss Fanny.

'In Rome,' Mr Sparkler answered. 'I am here by myself, myself. I came to call upon Mr Edward Dorrit myself. Indeed, upon Mr Dorrit likewise. In fact, upon the family.'

Turning graciously to the attendants, Miss Fanny inquired whether her papa or brother was within? The reply being that they were both within, Mr Sparkler humbly offered his arm. Miss Fanny accepting it, was squired up the great staircase by Mr Sparkler, who, if he still believed (which there is not any reason to doubt) that she had no nonsense about her, rather deceived himself.

Arrived in a mouldering reception-room, where the faded hangings, of a sad sea-green, had worn and withered until they looked as if they might have claimed kindred with the waifs of seaweed drifting under the windows, or clinging to the walls and weeping for their imprisoned relations, Miss Fanny despatched emissaries for her father and brother. Pending whose appearance, she showed to great advantage on a sofa, completing Mr Sparkler's conquest with some remarks upon Dante - known to that gentleman as an eccentric man in the nature of an Old File, who used to put leaves round his head, and sit upon a stool for some unaccountable purpose, outside the cathedral at Florence.

Mr Dorrit welcomed the visitor with the highest urbanity, and most courtly manners. He inquired particularly after Mrs Merdle. He inquired particularly after Mr Merdle. Mr Sparkler said, or rather twitched out of himself in small pieces by the shirt-collar, that Mrs Merdle having completely used up her place in the country, and also her house at Brighton, and being, of course, unable, don't you see, to remain in London when there wasn't a soul there, and not feeling herself this year quite up to visiting about at people's places, had resolved to have a touch at Rome, where a woman like herself, with a proverbially fine appearance, and with no nonsense about her, couldn't fail to be a great acquisition. As to Mr Merdle, he was so much wanted by the men in the City and the rest of those places, and was such a doosed extraordinary phenomenon in Buying and Banking and that, that Mr Sparkler doubted if the monetary system of the country would be able to spare him; though that his work was occasionally one too many for him, and that he would be all the better for a temporary shy at an entirely new scene and climate, Mr Sparkler did not conceal. As to himself, Mr Sparkler conveyed to the Dorrit family that he was going, on rather particular business, wherever they were going.

This immense conversational achievement required time, but was effected. Being effected, Mr Dorrit expressed his hope that Mr Sparkler

would shortly dine with them. Mr Sparkler received the idea so kindly that Mr Dorrit asked what he was going to do that day, for instance? As he was going to do nothing that day (his usual occupation, and one for which he was particularly qualified), he was secured without postponement; being further bound over to accompany the ladies to the Opera in the evening.

At dinner-time Mr Sparkler rose out of the sea, like Venus's son taking after his mother, and made a splendid appearance ascending the great staircase. If Fanny had been charming in the morning, she was now thrice charming, very becomingly dressed in her most suitable colours, and with an air of negligence upon her that doubled Mr Sparkler's fetters, and riveted them.

'I hear you are acquainted, Mr Sparkler,' said his host at dinner, 'with - ha - Mr Gowan. Mr Henry Gowan?'

'Perfectly, sir,' returned Mr Sparkler. 'His mother and my mother are cronies in fact.'

'If I had thought of it, Amy,' said Mr Dorrit, with a patronage as magnificent as that of Lord Decimus himself, 'you should have despatched a note to them, asking them to dine to-day. Some of our people could have - ha - fetched them, and taken them home. We could have spared a - hum - gondola for that purpose. I am sorry to have forgotten this. Pray remind me of them to-morrow.'

Little Dorrit was not without doubts how Mr Henry Gowan might take their patronage; but she promised not to fail in the reminder.

'Pray, does Mr Henry Gowan paint - ha - Portraits?' inquired Mr Dorrit.

Mr Sparkler opined that he painted anything, if he could get the job.

'He has no particular walk?' said Mr Dorrit.

Mr Sparkler, stimulated by Love to brilliancy, replied that for a particular walk a man ought to have a particular pair of shoes; as, for example, shooting, shooting-shoes; cricket, cricket-shoes. Whereas, he believed that Henry Gowan had no particular pair of shoes.

'No speciality?' said Mr Dorrit.

This being a very long word for Mr Sparkler, and his mind being exhausted by his late effort, he replied, 'No, thank you. I seldom take it.'

'Well!' said Mr Dorrit. 'It would be very agreeable to me to present a gentleman so connected, with some - ha - Testimonial of my desire to further his interests, and develop the - hum - germs of his genius. I think I must engage Mr Gowan to paint my picture. If the result should be - ha - mutually satisfactory, I might afterwards engage him to try his hand upon my family.'

The exquisitely bold and original thought presented itself to Mr Sparkler, that there was an opening here for saying there were some of the family (emphasising 'some' in a marked manner) to whom no painter could render justice. But, for want of a form of words in which to express the idea, it returned to the skies.

This was the more to be regretted as Miss Fanny greatly applauded the notion of the portrait, and urged her papa to act upon it. She surmised, she said, that Mr Gowan had lost better and higher opportunities by marrying his pretty wife; and Love in a cottage, painting pictures for dinner, was so delightfully interesting, that she begged her papa to give him the commission whether he could paint a likeness or not: though indeed both she and Amy knew he could, from having seen a speaking likeness on his easel that day, and having had the opportunity of comparing it with the original. These remarks made Mr Sparkler (as perhaps they were intended to do) nearly distracted; for while on the one hand they expressed Miss Fanny's susceptibility of the tender passion, she herself showed such an innocent unconsciousness of his admiration that his eyes goggled in his head with jealousy of an unknown rival.

Descending into the sea again after dinner, and ascending out of it at the Opera staircase, preceded by one of their gondoliers, like an attendant Merman, with a great linen lantern, they entered their box, and Mr Sparkler entered on an evening of agony. The theatre being dark, and the box light, several visitors lounged in during the representation; in whom Fanny was so interested, and in conversation with whom she fell into such charming attitudes, as she had little confidences with them, and little disputes concerning the identity of people in distant boxes, that the wretched Sparkler hated all mankind. But he had two consolations at the close of the performance. She gave him her fan to hold while she adjusted her cloak, and it was his blessed privilege to give her his arm down-stairs again. These crumbs of encouragement, Mr Sparkler thought, would just keep him going; and it is not impossible that Miss Dorrit thought so too.

The Merman with his light was ready at the box-door, and other Mermen with other lights were ready at many of the doors. The Dorrit Merman held his lantern low, to show the steps, and Mr Sparkler put on another heavy set of fetters over his former set, as he watched her

radiant feet twinkling down the stairs beside him. Among the loiterers here, was Blandois of Paris. He spoke, and moved forward beside Fanny.

Little Dorrit was in front with her brother and Mrs General (Mr Dorrit had remained at home), but on the brink of the quay they all came together. She started again to find Blandois close to her, handing Fanny into the boat.

'Gowan has had a loss,' he said, 'since he was made happy to-day by a visit from fair ladies.'

'A loss?' repeated Fanny, relinquished by the bereaved Sparkler, and taking her seat.

'A loss,' said Blandois. 'His dog Lion.'

Little Dorrit's hand was in his, as he spoke.

'He is dead,' said Blandois.

'Dead?' echoed Little Dorrit. 'That noble dog?'

'Faith, dear ladies!' said Blandois, smiling and shrugging his shoulders, 'somebody has poisoned that noble dog. He is as dead as the Doges!'