

Charles Dickens

Dombey and Son

CHAPTER 1

Dombey and Son

Dombey sat in the corner of the darkened room in the great arm-chair by the bedside, and Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead, carefully disposed on a low settee immediately in front of the fire and close to it, as if his constitution were analogous to that of a muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new.

Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age. Son about eight-and-forty minutes. Dombey was rather bald, rather red, and though a handsome well-made man, too stern and pompous in appearance, to be prepossessing. Son was very bald, and very red, and though (of course) an undeniably fine infant, somewhat crushed and spotty in his general effect, as yet. On the brow of Dombey, Time and his brother Care had set some marks, as on a tree that was to come down in good time — remorseless twins they are for striding through their human forests, notching as they go — while the countenance of Son was crossed with a thousand little creases, which the same deceitful Time would take delight in smoothing out and wearing away

with the flat part of his scythe, as a preparation of the surface for his deeper operations.

Dombey, exulting in the long-looked-for event, jingled and jingled the heavy gold watch-chain that depended from below his trim blue coat, whereof the buttons sparkled phosphorescently in the feeble rays of the distant fire. Son, with his little fists curled up and clenched, seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly.

'The House will once again, Mrs Dombey,' said Mr Dombey, 'be not only in name but in fact Dombey and Son;' and he added, in a tone of luxurious satisfaction, with his eyes half-closed as if he were reading the name in a device of flowers, and inhaling their fragrance at the same time; 'Dom-bey and Son!'

The words had such a softening influence, that he appended a term of endearment to Mrs Dombey's name (though not without some hesitation, as being a man but little used to that form of address): and said, 'Mrs Dombey, my — my dear.'

A transient flush of faint surprise overspread the sick lady's face as she raised her eyes towards him.

'He will be christened Paul, my — Mrs Dombey — of course.'

She feebly echoed, 'Of course,' or rather expressed it by the motion of her lips, and closed her eyes again.

'His father's name, Mrs Dombey, and his

grandfather's! I wish his grandfather were alive this day! There is some inconvenience in the necessity of writing Junior,' said Mr Dombey, making a fictitious autograph on his knee; 'but it is merely of a private and personal complexion. It doesn't enter into the correspondence of the House. Its signature remains the same.' And again he said 'Dombey and Son, in exactly the same tone as before.

Those three words conveyed the one idea of Mr Dombey's life. The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre.

Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them. A. D. had no concern with Anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei — and Son.

He had risen, as his father had before him, in the course of life and death, from Son to Dombey, and for nearly twenty years had been the sole representative of the Firm. Of those years he had been married, ten — married, as some said, to a lady with no heart to give him; whose happiness was in the past, and who was content to bind her broken spirit to the dutiful and meek endurance of the present. Such idle talk was little likely

to reach the ears of Mr Dombey, whom it nearly concerned; and probably no one in the world would have received it with such utter incredulity as he, if it had reached him. Dombey and Son had often dealt in hides, but never in hearts. They left that fancy ware to boys and girls, and boarding-schools and books. Mr Dombey would have reasoned: That a matrimonial alliance with himself must, in the nature of things, be gratifying and honourable to any woman of common sense. That the hope of giving birth to a new partner in such a House, could not fail to awaken a glorious and stirring ambition in the breast of the least ambitious of her sex. That Mrs Dombey had entered on that social contract of matrimony: almost necessarily part of a genteel and wealthy station, even without reference to the perpetuation of family Firms: with her eyes fully open to these advantages. That Mrs Dombey had had daily practical knowledge of his position in society. That Mrs Dombey had always sat at the head of his table, and done the honours of his house in a remarkably lady-like and becoming manner. That Mrs Dombey must have been happy. That she couldn't help it.

Or, at all events, with one drawback. Yes. That he would have allowed. With only one; but that one certainly involving much. With the drawback of hope deferred. That hope deferred, which, (as the Scripture very correctly tells us, Mr Dombey would have added

in a patronising way; for his highest distinct idea even of Scripture, if examined, would have been found to be; that as forming part of a general whole, of which Dombey and Son formed another part, it was therefore to be commended and upheld) maketh the heart sick. They had been married ten years, and until this present day on which Mr Dombey sat jingling and jingling his heavy gold watch-chain in the great arm-chair by the side of the bed, had had no issue.

— To speak of; none worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before, and the child, who had stolen into the chamber unobserved, was now crouching timidly, in a corner whence she could see her mother's face. But what was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested — a bad Boy — nothing more.

Mr Dombey's cup of satisfaction was so full at this moment, however, that he felt he could afford a drop or two of its contents, even to sprinkle on the dust in the by-path of his little daughter.

So he said, 'Florence, you may go and look at your pretty brother, if you like, I daresay. Don't touch him!'

The child glanced keenly at the blue coat and stiff white cravat, which, with a pair of creaking boots and a very loud ticking watch, embodied her idea of a father; but her eyes returned to her mother's face immediately,

and she neither moved nor answered.

'Her insensibility is as proof against a brother as against every thing else,' said Mr Dombey to himself. He seemed so confirmed in a previous opinion by the discovery, as to be quite glad of it'

Next moment, the lady had opened her eyes and seen the child; and the child had run towards her; and, standing on tiptoe, the better to hide her face in her embrace, had clung about her with a desperate affection very much at variance with her years.

'Oh Lord bless me!' said Mr Dombey, rising testily. 'A very illadvised and feverish proceeding this, I am sure. Please to ring there for Miss Florence's nurse. Really the person should be more care-'

'Wait! I — had better ask Doctor Peps if he'll have the goodness to step upstairs again perhaps. I'll go down. I'll go down. I needn't beg you,' he added, pausing for a moment at the settee before the fire, 'to take particular care of this young gentleman, Mrs — '

'Blockitt, Sir?' suggested the nurse, a simpering piece of faded gentility, who did not presume to state her name as a fact, but merely offered it as a mild suggestion.

'Of this young gentleman, Mrs Blockitt.'

'No, Sir, indeed. I remember when Miss Florence was born — '

'Ay, ay, ay,' said Mr Dombey, bending over the basket bedstead, and slightly bending his brows at the

same time. 'Miss Florence was all very well, but this is another matter. This young gentleman has to accomplish a destiny. A destiny, little fellow!' As he thus apostrophised the infant he raised one of his hands to his lips, and kissed it; then, seeming to fear that the action involved some compromise of his dignity, went, awkwardly enough, away.

Doctor Parker Peps, one of the Court Physicians, and a man of immense reputation for assisting at the increase of great families, was walking up and down the drawing-room with his hands behind him, to the unspeakable admiration of the family Surgeon, who had regularly puffed the case for the last six weeks, among all his patients, friends, and acquaintances, as one to which he was in hourly expectation day and night of being summoned, in conjunction with Doctor Parker Pep.

'Well, Sir,' said Doctor Parker Peps in a round, deep, sonorous voice, muffled for the occasion, like the knocker; 'do you find that your dear lady is at all roused by your visit?'

'Stimulated as it were?' said the family practitioner faintly: bowing at the same time to the Doctor, as much as to say, 'Excuse my putting in a word, but this is a valuable connexion.'

Mr Dombey was quite discomfited by the question. He had thought so little of the patient, that he was not in a condition to answer it. He said that it

would be a satisfaction to him, if Doctor Parker Peps would walk upstairs again.

'Good! We must not disguise from you, Sir,' said Doctor Parker Peps, 'that there is a want of power in Her Grace the Duchess — I beg your pardon; I confound names; I should say, in your amiable lady.

That there is a certain degree of languor, and a general absence of elasticity, which we would rather — not — 'See,' interposed the family practitioner with another inclination of the head.

'Quite so,' said Doctor Parker Peps,' which we would rather not see. It would appear that the system of Lady Cankaby — excuse me: I should say of Mrs Dombey: I confuse the names of cases — '

'So very numerous,' murmured the family practitioner — 'can't be expected I'm sure — quite wonderful if otherwise — Doctor Parker Peps's West-End practice — '

'Thank you,' said the Doctor, 'quite so. It would appear, I was observing, that the system of our patient has sustained a shock, from which it can only hope to rally by a great and strong — '

'And vigorous,' murmured the family practitioner.

'Quite so,' assented the Doctor — 'and vigorous effort. Mr Pilkins here, who from his position of medical adviser in this family — no one better qualified to fill that position, I am sure.'

'Oh!' murmured the family practitioner. "'Praise

from Sir Hubert Stanley!"

'You are good enough,' returned Doctor Parker Peps, 'to say so. Mr Pilkins who, from his position, is best acquainted with the patient's constitution in its normal state (an acquaintance very valuable to us in forming our opinions in these occasions), is of opinion, with me, that Nature must be called upon to make a vigorous effort in this instance; and that if our interesting friend the Countess of Dombey — I beg your pardon; Mrs Dombey — should not be —'

'Able,' said the family practitioner.

'To make,' said Doctor Parker Peps.

'That effort,' said the family practitioner.

'Successfully,' said they both together.

'Then,' added Doctor Parker Peps, alone and very gravely, a crisis might arise, which we should both sincerely deplore.'

With that, they stood for a few seconds looking at the ground.

Then, on the motion — made in dumb show — of Doctor Parker Peps, they went upstairs; the family practitioner opening the room door for that distinguished professional, and following him out, with most obsequious politeness.

To record of Mr Dombey that he was not in his way affected by this intelligence, would be to do him an injustice. He was not a man of whom it could properly be said that he was ever startled, or shocked;

but he certainly had a sense within him, that if his wife should sicken and decay, he would be very sorry, and that he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions, which was well worth the having, and could not be lost without sincere regret. Though it would be a cool, business-like, gentlemanly, self-possessed regret, no doubt.

His meditations on the subject were soon interrupted, first by the rustling of garments on the staircase, and then by the sudden whisking into the room of a lady rather past the middle age than otherwise but dressed in a very juvenile manner, particularly as to the tightness of her bodice, who, running up to him with a kind of screw in her face and carriage, expressive of suppressed emotion, flung her arms around his neck, and said, in a choking voice, 'My dear Paul! He's quite a Dombey!'

'Well, well!' returned her brother — for Mr Dombey was her brother — 'I think he is like the family. Don't agitate yourself, Louisa.'

'It's very foolish of me,' said Louisa, sitting down, and taking out her pocket-handkerchief, 'but he's — he's such a perfect Dombey!'

Mr Dombey coughed.

'It's so extraordinary,' said Louisa; smiling through her tears, which indeed were not overpowering, 'as to be perfectly ridiculous. So completely our family.'

I never saw anything like it in my life!

'But what is this about Fanny, herself?' said Mr Dombey. 'How is Fanny?'

'My dear Paul,' returned Louisa, 'it's nothing whatever. Take my word, it's nothing whatever. There is exhaustion, certainly, but nothing like what I underwent myself, either with George or Frederick.

An effort is necessary. That's all. If dear Fanny were a Dombey! — But I daresay she'll make it; I have no doubt she'll make it. Knowing it to be required of her, as a duty, of course she'll make it. My dear Paul, it's very weak and silly of me, I know, to be so trembly and shaky from head to foot; but I am so very queer that I must ask you for a glass of wine and a morsel of that cake.'

Mr Dombey promptly supplied her with these refreshments from a tray on the table.

'I shall not drink my love to you, Paul,' said Louisa: 'I shall drink to the little Dombey. Good gracious me! — it's the most astonishing thing I ever knew in all my days, he's such a perfect Dombey.'

Quenching this expression of opinion in a short hysterical laugh which terminated in tears, Louisa cast up her eyes, and emptied her glass.

'I know it's very weak and silly of me,' she repeated, 'to be so trembly and shaky from head to foot, and to allow my feelings so completely to get the better of me, but I cannot help it. I thought I should have

fallen out of the staircase window as I came down from seeing dear Fanny, and that tiddy ickle sing.' These last words originated in a sudden vivid reminiscence of the baby.

They were succeeded by a gentle tap at the door.

'Mrs Chick,' said a very bland female voice outside, 'how are you now, my dear friend?'

'My dear Paul,' said Louisa in a low voice, as she rose from her seat, 'it's Miss Tox. The kindest creature! I never could have got here without her! Miss Tox, my brother Mr Dombey. Paul, my dear, my very particular friend Miss Tox.'

The lady thus specially presented, was a long lean figure, wearing such a faded air that she seemed not to have been made in what linen-drapers call 'fast colours' originally, and to have, by little and little, washed out. But for this she might have been described as the very pink of general propitiation and politeness. From a long habit of listening admiringly to everything that was said in her presence, and looking at the speakers as if she were mentally engaged in taking off impressions of their images upon her soul, never to part with the same but with life, her head had quite settled on one side.

Her hands had contracted a spasmodic habit of raising themselves of their own accord as in involuntary admiration. Her eyes were liable to a similar affection. She had the softest voice that ever was heard; and her nose, stupendously aquiline, had a little knob in the

very centre or key-stone of the bridge, whence it tended downwards towards her face, as in an invincible determination never to turn up at anything.

Miss Tox's dress, though perfectly genteel and good, had a certain character of angularity and scantiness. She was accustomed to wear odd weedy little flowers in her bonnets and caps. Strange grasses were sometimes perceived in her hair; and it was observed by the curious, of all her collars, frills, tuckers, wristbands, and other gossamer articles — indeed of everything she wore which had two ends to it intended to unite — that the two ends were never on good terms, and wouldn't quite meet without a struggle. She had furry articles for winter wear, as tippetts, boas, and muffs, which stood up on end in rampant manner, and were not at all sleek. She was much given to the carrying about of small bags with snaps to them, that went off like little pistols when they were shut up; and when full-dressed, she wore round her neck the barrenest of locketts, representing a fishy old eye, with no approach to speculation in it. These and other appearances of a similar nature, had served to propagate the opinion, that Miss Tox was a lady of what is called a limited independence, which she turned to the best account. Possibly her mincing gait encouraged the belief, and suggested that her clipping a step of ordinary compass into two or three, originated in her habit of making the most of everything.

'I am sure,' said Miss Tox, with a prodigious curtsy, 'that to have the honour of being presented to Mr Dombey is a distinction which I have long sought, but very little expected at the present moment. My dear Mrs Chick — may I say Louisa!'

Mrs Chick took Miss Tox's hand in hers, rested the foot of her wine-glass upon it, repressed a tear, and said in a low voice, 'God bless you!'

'My dear Louisa then,' said Miss Tox, 'my sweet friend, how are you now?'

'Better,' Mrs Chick returned. 'Take some wine. You have been almost as anxious as I have been, and must want it, I am sure.'

Mr Dombey of course officiated, and also refilled his sister's glass, which she (looking another way, and unconscious of his intention) held straight and steady the while, and then regarded with great astonishment, saying, 'My dear Paul, what have you been doing!'

'Miss Tox, Paul,' pursued Mrs Chick, still retaining her hand, 'knowing how much I have been interested in the anticipation of the event of to-day, and how trembly and shaky I have been from head to foot in expectation of it, has been working at a little gift for Fanny, which I promised to present. Miss Tox is ingenuity itself.'

'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox. 'Don't say so.'

'It is only a pincushion for the toilette table, Paul,' resumed his sister; 'one of those trifles which are

insignificant to your sex in general, as it's very natural they should be — we have no business to expect they should be otherwise — but to which we attach some interest.

'Miss Tox is very good,' said Mr Dombey.

'And I do say, and will say, and must say,' pursued his sister, pressing the foot of the wine-glass on Miss Tox's hand, at each of the three clauses, 'that Miss Tox has very prettily adapted the sentiment to the occasion. I call "Welcome little Dombey" Poetry, myself!'

'Is that the device?' inquired her brother.

'That is the device,' returned Louisa.

'But do me the justice to remember, my dear Louisa,' said Miss Toxin a tone of low and earnest entreaty, 'that nothing but the — I have some difficulty in expressing myself — the dubiousness of the result would have induced me to take so great a liberty: "Welcome, Master Dombey," would have been much more congenial to my feelings, as I am sure you know. But the uncertainty attendant on angelic strangers, will, I hope, excuse what must otherwise appear an unwarrantable familiarity.' Miss Tox made a graceful bend as she spoke, in favour of Mr Dombey, which that gentleman graciously acknowledged. Even the sort of recognition of Dombey and Son, conveyed in the foregoing conversation, was so palatable to him, that his sister, Mrs Chick — though he affected to consider

her a weak good-natured person — had perhaps more influence over him than anybody else.

'My dear Paul,' that lady broke out afresh, after silently contemplating his features for a few moments, 'I don't know whether to laugh or cry when I look at you, I declare, you do so remind me of that dear baby upstairs.'

'Well!' said Mrs Chick, with a sweet smile, 'after this, I forgive Fanny everything!'

It was a declaration in a Christian spirit, and Mrs Chick felt that it did her good. Not that she had anything particular to forgive in her sister-in-law, nor indeed anything at all, except her having married her brother — in itself a species of audacity — and her having, in the course of events, given birth to a girl instead of a boy: which, as Mrs Chick had frequently observed, was not quite what she had expected of her, and was not a pleasant return for all the attention and distinction she had met with.

Mr Dombey being hastily summoned out of the room at this moment, the two ladies were left alone together. Miss Tox immediately became spasmodic.

'I knew you would admire my brother. I told you so beforehand, my dear,' said Louisa. Miss Tox's hands and eyes expressed how much. 'And as to his property, my dear!'

'Ah!' said Miss Tox, with deep feeling. 'Im-mense!'

'But his deportment, my dear Louisa!' said Miss Tox. 'His presence!

His dignity! No portrait that I have ever seen of anyone has been half so replete with those qualities. Something so stately, you know: so uncompromising: so very wide across the chest: so upright! A pecuniary Duke of York, my love, and nothing short of it!' said Miss Tox.

'That's what I should designate him.'

'Why, my dear Paul!' exclaimed his sister, as he returned, 'you look quite pale! There's nothing the matter?'

'I am sorry to say, Louisa, that they tell me that Fanny — '

'Now, my dear Paul,' returned his sister rising, 'don't believe it.

Do not allow yourself to receive a turn unnecessarily. Remember of what importance you are to society, and do not allow yourself to be worried by what is so very inconsiderately told you by people who ought to know better. Really I'm surprised at them.'

'I hope I know, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, stiffly, 'how to bear myself before the world.'

'Nobody better, my dear Paul. Nobody half so well. They would be ignorant and base indeed who doubted it.'

'Ignorant and base indeed!' echoed Miss Tox softly.

'But,' pursued Louisa, 'if you have any reliance on my experience, Paul, you may rest assured that there is nothing wanting but an effort on Fanny's part. And that effort,' she continued, taking off her bonnet, and adjusting her cap and gloves, in a business-like manner, 'she must be encouraged, and really, if necessary, urged to make. Now, my dear Paul, come upstairs with me.'

Mr Dombey, who, besides being generally influenced by his sister for the reason already mentioned, had really faith in her as an experienced and bustling matron, acquiesced; and followed her, at once, to the sick chamber.

The lady lay upon her bed as he had left her, clasping her little daughter to her breast. The child clung close about her, with the same intensity as before, and never raised her head, or moved her soft cheek from her mother's face, or looked on those who stood around, or spoke, or moved, or shed a tear.

'Restless without the little girl,' the Doctor whispered Mr Dombey.

'We found it best to have her in again.'

'Can nothing be done?' asked Mr Dombey.

The Doctor shook his head. 'We can do no more.'

The windows stood open, and the twilight was gathering without.

The scent of the restoratives that had been tried was pungent in the room, but had no fragrance in the dull and languid air the lady breathed.

There was such a solemn stillness round the bed; and the two medical attendants seemed to look on the impassive form with so much compassion and so little hope, that Mrs Chick was for the moment diverted from her purpose. But presently summoning courage, and what she called presence of mind, she sat down by the bedside, and said in the low precise tone of one who endeavours to awaken a sleeper: 'Fanny! Fanny!'

There was no sound in answer but the loud ticking of Mr Dombey's watch and Doctor Parker Peps's watch, which seemed in the silence to be running a race.

'Fanny, my dear,' said Mrs Chick, with assumed lightness, 'here's Mr Dombey come to see you. Won't you speak to him? They want to lay your little boy — the baby, Fanny, you know; you have hardly seen him yet, I think — in bed; but they can't till you rouse yourself a little. Don't you think it's time you roused yourself a little? Eh?'

She bent her ear to the bed, and listened: at the same time looking round at the bystanders, and holding up her finger.

'Eh?' she repeated, 'what was it you said, Fanny? I didn't hear you.'

No word or sound in answer. Mr Dombey's watch and Dr Parker Peps's watch seemed to be racing faster.

'Now, really, Fanny my dear,' said the sister-in-law, altering her position, and speaking less

confidently, and more earnestly, in spite of herself, 'I shall have to be quite cross with you, if you don't rouse yourself. It's necessary for you to make an effort, and perhaps a very great and painful effort which you are not disposed to make; but this is a world of effort you know, Fanny, and we must never yield, when so much depends upon us. Come! Try! I must really scold you if you don't!'

The race in the ensuing pause was fierce and furious. The watches seemed to jostle, and to trip each other up.

'Fanny!' said Louisa, glancing round, with a gathering alarm. 'Only look at me. Only open your eyes to show me that you hear and understand me; will you? Good Heaven, gentlemen, what is to be done!'

The two medical attendants exchanged a look across the bed; and the Physician, stooping down, whispered in the child's ear. Not having understood the purport of his whisper, the little creature turned her perfectly colourless face and deep dark eyes towards him; but without loosening her hold in the least The whisper was repeated.

'Mama!' said the child.

The little voice, familiar and dearly loved, awakened some show of consciousness, even at that ebb. For a moment, the closed eye lids trembled, and the nostril quivered, and the faintest shadow of a smile was seen.

'Mama!' cried the child sobbing aloud. 'Oh dear Mama! oh dear Mama!'

The Doctor gently brushed the scattered ringlets of the child, aside from the face and mouth of the mother. Alas how calm they lay there; how little breath there was to stir them!

Thus, clinging fast to that slight spar within her arms, the mother drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world.

CHAPTER 2

In which Timely Provision is made for an Emergency that will sometimes arise in the best-regulated Families

'I shall never cease to congratulate myself,' said Mrs Chick,' on having said, when I little thought what was in store for us, — really as if I was inspired by something, — that I forgave poor dear Fanny everything. Whatever happens, that must always be a comfort to me!'

Mrs Chick made this impressive observation in the drawing-room, after having descended thither from the inspection of the mantua-makers upstairs, who were busy on the family mourning. She delivered it for the behoof of Mr Chick, who was a stout bald gentleman, with a very large face, and his hands continually in his

pockets, and who had a tendency in his nature to whistle and hum tunes, which, sensible of the indecorum of such sounds in a house of grief, he was at some pains to repress at present.

'Don't you over-exert yourself, Loo,' said Mr Chick, 'or you'll be laid up with spasms, I see. Right tolor rul! Bless my soul, I forgot! We're here one day and gone the next!'

Mrs Chick contented herself with a glance of reproof, and then proceeded with the thread of her discourse.

'I am sure,' she said, 'I hope this heart-rending occurrence will be a warning to all of us, to accustom ourselves to rouse ourselves, and to make efforts in time where they're required of us. There's a moral in everything, if we would only avail ourselves of it. It will be our own faults if we lose sight of this one.'

Mr Chick invaded the grave silence which ensued on this remark with the singularly inappropriate air of 'A cobbler there was;' and checking himself, in some confusion, observed, that it was undoubtedly our own faults if we didn't improve such melancholy occasions as the present.

'Which might be better improved, I should think, Mr C.,' retorted his helpmate, after a short pause, 'than by the introduction, either of the college hornpipe, or the equally unmeaning and unfeeling remark of rump-te-iddity, bow-wow-wow!' — which Mr Chick

had indeed indulged in, under his breath, and which Mrs Chick repeated in a tone of withering scorn.

'Merely habit, my dear,' pleaded Mr Chick.

'Nonsense! Habit!' returned his wife. 'If you're a rational being, don't make such ridiculous excuses. Habit! If I was to get a habit (as you call it) of walking on the ceiling, like the flies, I should hear enough of it, I daresay.'

It appeared so probable that such a habit might be attended with some degree of notoriety, that Mr Chick didn't venture to dispute the position.

'Bow-wow-wow!' repeated Mrs Chick with an emphasis of blighting contempt on the last syllable. 'More like a professional singer with the hydrophobia, than a man in your station of life!'

'How's the Baby, Loo?' asked Mr Chick: to change the subject.

'What Baby do you mean?' answered Mrs Chick.

'The poor bereaved little baby,' said Mr Chick. 'I don't know of any other, my dear.'

'You don't know of any other,' retorted Mrs Chick. 'More shame for you, I was going to say.'

Mr Chick looked astonished.

'I am sure the morning I have had, with that dining-room downstairs, one mass of babies, no one in their senses would believe.'

'One mass of babies!' repeated Mr Chick, staring with an alarmed expression about him.

'It would have occurred to most men,' said Mrs Chick, 'that poor dear Fanny being no more, — those words of mine will always be a balm and comfort to me,' here she dried her eyes; 'it becomes necessary to provide a Nurse.'

'Oh! Ah!' said Mr Chick. 'Toor-ru! — such is life, I mean. I hope you are suited, my dear.'

'Indeed I am not,' said Mrs Chick; 'nor likely to be, so far as I can see, and in the meantime the poor child seems likely to be starved to death. Paul is so very particular — naturally so, of course, having set his whole heart on this one boy — and there are so many objections to everybody that offers, that I don't see, myself, the least chance of an arrangement. Meanwhile, of course, the child is —'

'Going to the Devil,' said Mr Chick, thoughtfully, 'to be sure.'

Admonished, however, that he had committed himself, by the indignation expressed in Mrs Chick's countenance at the idea of a Dombey going there; and thinking to atone for his misconduct by a bright suggestion, he added: 'Couldn't something temporary be done with a teapot?'

If he had meant to bring the subject prematurely to a close, he could not have done it more effectually. After looking at him for some moments in silent resignation, Mrs Chick said she trusted he hadn't said it in aggravation, because that would do very little honour

to his heart. She trusted he hadn't said it seriously, because that would do very little honour to his head. As in any case, he couldn't, however sanguine his disposition, hope to offer a remark that would be a greater outrage on human nature in general, we would beg to leave the discussion at that point.

Mrs Chick then walked majestically to the window and peeped through the blind, attracted by the sound of wheels. Mr Chick, finding that his destiny was, for the time, against him, said no more, and walked off. But it was not always thus with Mr Chick. He was often in the ascendant himself, and at those times punished Louisa roundly. In their matrimonial bickerings they were, upon the whole, a well-matched, fairly-balanced, give-and-take couple. It would have been, generally speaking, very difficult to have betted on the winner.

Often when Mr Chick seemed beaten, he would suddenly make a start, turn the tables, clatter them about the ears of Mrs Chick, and carry all before him. Being liable himself to similar unlooked for checks from Mrs Chick, their little contests usually possessed a character of uncertainty that was very animating.

Miss Tox had arrived on the wheels just now alluded to, and came running into the room in a breathless condition. 'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox, 'is the vacancy still unsupplied?'

'You good soul, yes,' said Mrs Chick.

'Then, my dear Louisa,' returned Miss Tox, 'I hope and believe — but in one moment, my dear, I'll introduce the party.'

Running downstairs again as fast as she had run up, Miss Tox got the party out of the hackney-coach, and soon returned with it under convoy.

It then appeared that she had used the word, not in its legal or business acceptation, when it merely expresses an individual, but as a noun of multitude, or signifying many: for Miss Tox escorted a plump rosy-cheeked wholesome apple-faced young woman, with an infant in her arms; a younger woman not so plump, but apple-faced also, who led a plump and apple-faced child in each hand; another plump and also apple-faced boy who walked by himself; and finally, a plump and apple-faced man, who carried in his arms another plump and apple-faced boy, whom he stood down on the floor, and admonished, in a husky whisper, to 'kitch hold of his brother Johnny.'

'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox, 'knowing your great anxiety, and wishing to relieve it, I posted off myself to the Queen Charlotte's Royal Married Females,' which you had forgot, and put the question, Was there anybody there that they thought would suit? No, they said there was not. When they gave me that answer, I do assure you, my dear, I was almost driven to despair on your account. But it did so happen, that one of the Royal Married Females, hearing the inquiry,

reminded the matron of another who had gone to her own home, and who, she said, would in all likelihood be most satisfactory. The moment I heard this, and had it corroborated by the matron — excellent references and unimpeachable character — I got the address, my dear, and posted off again.'

'Like the dear good Tox, you are!' said Louisa.

'Not at all,' returned Miss Tox. 'Don't say so. Arriving at the house (the cleanest place, my dear! You might eat your dinner off the floor), I found the whole family sitting at table; and feeling that no account of them could be half so comfortable to you and Mr Dombey as the sight of them all together, I brought them all away. This gentleman,' said Miss Tox, pointing out the apple-faced man, 'is the father. Will you have the goodness to come a little forward, Sir?'

The apple-faced man having sheepishly complied with this request, stood chuckling and grinning in a front row.

'This is his wife, of course,' said Miss Tox, singling out the young woman with the baby. 'How do you do, Polly?'

'I'm pretty well, I thank you, Ma'am,' said Polly.

By way of bringing her out dexterously, Miss Tox had made the inquiry as in condescension to an old acquaintance whom she hadn't seen for a fortnight or so.

'I'm glad to hear it,' said Miss Tox. 'The other

young woman is her unmarried sister who lives with them, and would take care of her children. Her name's Jemima. How do you do, Jemima?'

'I'm pretty well, I thank you, Ma'am,' returned Jemima.

'I'm very glad indeed to hear it,' said Miss Tox. 'I hope you'll keep so. Five children. Youngest six weeks. The fine little boy with the blister on his nose is the eldest. The blister, I believe,' said Miss Tox, looking round upon the family, 'is not constitutional, but accidental?'

The apple-faced man was understood to growl, 'Flat iron.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Miss Tox, 'did you? 'Flat iron,' he repeated.

'Oh yes,' said Miss Tox. 'Yes! quite true. I forgot. The little creature, in his mother's absence, smelt a warm flat iron. You're quite right, Sir. You were going to have the goodness to inform me, when we arrived at the door that you were by trade a — '

'Stoker,' said the man.

'A choker!' said Miss Tox, quite aghast.

'Stoker,' said the man. 'Steam engine.'

'Oh-h! Yes!' returned Miss Tox, looking thoughtfully at him, and seeming still to have but a very imperfect understanding of his meaning.

'And how do you like it, Sir?'

'Which, Mum?' said the man.

'That,' replied Miss Tox. 'Your trade.'

'Oh! Pretty well, Mum. The ashes sometimes gets in here;' touching his chest: 'and makes a man speak gruff, as at the present time. But it is ashes, Mum, not crustiness.'

Miss Tox seemed to be so little enlightened by this reply, as to find a difficulty in pursuing the subject. But Mrs Chick relieved her, by entering into a close private examination of Polly, her children, her marriage certificate, testimonials, and so forth. Polly coming out unscathed from this ordeal, Mrs Chick withdrew with her report to her brother's room, and as an emphatic comment on it, and corroboration of it, carried the two rosiest little Toodles with her. Toodle being the family name of the apple-faced family.

Mr Dombey had remained in his own apartment since the death of his wife, absorbed in visions of the youth, education, and destination of his baby son. Something lay at the bottom of his cool heart, colder and heavier than its ordinary load; but it was more a sense of the child's loss than his own, awakening within him an almost angry sorrow. That the life and progress on which he built such hopes, should be endangered in the outset by so mean a want; that Dombey and Son should be tottering for a nurse, was a sore humiliation. And yet in his pride and jealousy, he viewed with so much bitterness the thought of being dependent for the very first step towards the accomplishment of his soul's

desire, on a hired serving-woman who would be to the child, for the time, all that even his alliance could have made his own wife, that in every new rejection of a candidate he felt a secret pleasure. The time had now come, however, when he could no longer be divided between these two sets of feelings. The less so, as there seemed to be no flaw in the title of Polly Toodle after his sister had set it forth, with many commendations on the indefatigable friendship of Miss Tox.

'These children look healthy,' said Mr Dombey. 'But my God, to think of their some day claiming a sort of relationship to Paul!'

'But what relationship is there!' Louisa began — 'Is there!' echoed Mr Dombey, who had not intended his sister to participate in the thought he had unconsciously expressed. 'Is there, did you say, Louisa!'

'Can there be, I mean — '

'Why none,' said Mr Dombey, sternly. 'The whole world knows that, I presume. Grief has not made me idiotic, Louisa. Take them away, Louisa! Let me see this woman and her husband.'

Mrs Chick bore off the tender pair of Toodles, and presently returned with that tougher couple whose presence her brother had commanded.

'My good woman,' said Mr Dombey, turning round in his easy chair, as one piece, and not as a man with limbs and joints, 'I understand you are poor, and wish to earn money by nursing the little boy, my son,

who has been so prematurely deprived of what can never be replaced. I have no objection to your adding to the comforts of your family by that means. So far as I can tell, you seem to be a deserving object. But I must impose one or two conditions on you, before you enter my house in that capacity. While you are here, I must stipulate that you are always known as — say as Richards — an ordinary name, and convenient. Have you any objection to be known as Richards? You had better consult your husband.'

'Well?' said Mr Dombey, after a pretty long pause. 'What does your husband say to your being called Richards?'

As the husband did nothing but chuckle and grin, and continually draw his right hand across his mouth, moistening the palm, Mrs Toodle, after nudging him twice or thrice in vain, dropped a curtsey and replied 'that perhaps if she was to be called out of her name, it would be considered in the wages.'

'Oh, of course,' said Mr Dombey. 'I desire to make it a question of wages, altogether. Now, Richards, if you nurse my bereaved child, I wish you to remember this always. You will receive a liberal stipend in return for the discharge of certain duties, in the performance of which, I wish you to see as little of your family as possible. When those duties cease to be required and rendered, and the stipend ceases to be paid, there is an end of all relations between us. Do you

understand me?'

Mrs Toodle seemed doubtful about it; and as to Toodle himself, he had evidently no doubt whatever, that he was all abroad.

'You have children of your own,' said Mr Dombey. 'It is not at all in this bargain that you need become attached to my child, or that my child need become attached to you. I don't expect or desire anything of the kind. Quite the reverse. When you go away from here, you will have concluded what is a mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting: and will stay away. The child will cease to remember you; and you will cease, if you please, to remember the child.'

Mrs Toodle, with a little more colour in her cheeks than she had had before, said 'she hoped she knew her place.'

'I hope you do, Richards,' said Mr Dombey. 'I have no doubt you know it very well. Indeed it is so plain and obvious that it could hardly be otherwise. Louisa, my dear, arrange with Richards about money, and let her have it when and how she pleases. Mr what's-your name, a word with you, if you please!'

Thus arrested on the threshold as he was following his wife out of the room, Toodle returned and confronted Mr Dombey alone. He was a strong, loose, round-shouldered, shuffling, shaggy fellow, on whom his clothes sat negligently: with a good deal of hair and

whisker, deepened in its natural tint, perhaps by smoke and coal-dust: hard knotty hands: and a square forehead, as coarse in grain as the bark of an oak. A thorough contrast in all respects, to Mr Dombey, who was one of those close-shaved close-cut moneyed gentlemen who are glossy and crisp like new bank-notes, and who seem to be artificially braced and tightened as by the stimulating action of golden showerbaths.

'You have a son, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

'Four on 'em, Sir. Four hims and a her. All alive!'

'Why, it's as much as you can afford to keep them!' said Mr Dombey.

'I couldn't hardly afford but one thing in the world less, Sir.'

'What is that?'

'To lose 'em, Sir.'

'Can you read?' asked Mr Dombey.

'Why, not partick'ler, Sir.'

'Write?'

'With chalk, Sir?'

'With anything?'

'I could make shift to chalk a little bit, I think, if I was put to it,' said Toodle after some reflection.

'And yet,' said Mr Dombey, 'you are two or three and thirty, I suppose?'

'Thereabouts, I suppose, Sir,' answered Toodle, after more reflection 'Then why don't you learn?' asked

Mr Dombey.

'So I'm a going to, Sir. One of my little boys is a going to learn me, when he's old enough, and been to school himself.'

'Well,' said Mr Dombey, after looking at him attentively, and with no great favour, as he stood gazing round the room (principally round the ceiling) and still drawing his hand across and across his mouth.

'You heard what I said to your wife just now?'

'Polly heard it,' said Toodle, jerking his hat over his shoulder in the direction of the door, with an air of perfect confidence in his better half. 'It's all right.'

'But I ask you if you heard it. You did, I suppose, and understood it?' pursued Mr Dombey.

'I heerd it,' said Toodle, 'but I don't know as I understood it rightly Sir, 'account of being no scholar, and the words being — ask your pardon — rayther high. But Polly heerd it. It's all right.'

'As you appear to leave everything to her,' said Mr Dombey, frustrated in his intention of impressing his views still more distinctly on the husband, as the stronger character, 'I suppose it is of no use my saying anything to you.'

'Not a bit,' said Toodle. 'Polly heerd it. She's awake, Sir.'

'I won't detain you any longer then,' returned Mr Dombey, disappointed. 'Where have you worked all your life?'

'Mostly underground, Sir, 'till I got married. I come to the level then. I'm a going on one of these here railroads when they comes into full play.'

As he added in one of his hoarse whispers, 'We means to bring up little Biler to that line,' Mr Dombey inquired haughtily who little Biler was.

'The eldest on 'em, Sir,' said Toodle, with a smile. 'It ain't a common name. Sermuchser that when he was took to church the gen'lm'n said, it wam't a chris'en one, and he couldn't give it. But we always calls him Biler just the same. For we don't mean no harm. Not we.'

'Do you mean to say, Man,' inquired Mr Dombey; looking at him with marked displeasure, 'that you have called a child after a boiler?'

'No, no, Sir,' returned Toodle, with a tender consideration for his mistake. 'I should hope not! No, Sir. Arter a BILER Sir. The Steamingine was a'most as good as a godfather to him, and so we called him Biler, don't you see!'

As the last straw breaks the laden camel's back, this piece of information crushed the sinking spirits of Mr Dombey. He motioned his child's foster-father to the door, who departed by no means unwillingly: and then turning the key, paced up and down the room in solitary wretchedness.

It would be harsh, and perhaps not altogether true, to say of him that he felt these rubs and gratings against his pride more keenly than he had felt his wife's

death: but certainly they impressed that event upon him with new force, and communicated to it added weight and bitterness. It was a rude shock to his sense of property in his child, that these people — the mere dust of the earth, as he thought them — should be necessary to him; and it was natural that in proportion as he felt disturbed by it, he should deplore the occurrence which had made them so. For all his starched, impenetrable dignity and composure, he wiped blinding tears from his eyes as he paced up and down his room; and often said, with an emotion of which he would not, for the world, have had a witness, 'Poor little fellow!'

It may have been characteristic of Mr Dombey's pride, that he pitied himself through the child. Not poor me. Not poor widower, confiding by constraint in the wife of an ignorant Hind who has been working 'mostly underground' all his life, and yet at whose door Death had never knocked, and at whose poor table four sons daily sit — but poor little fellow!

Those words being on his lips, it occurred to him — and it is an instance of the strong attraction with which his hopes and fears and all his thoughts were tending to one centre — that a great temptation was being placed in this woman's way. Her infant was a boy too. Now, would it be possible for her to change them?

Though he was soon satisfied that he had dismissed the idea as romantic and unlikely — though possible, there was no denying — he could not help

pursuing it so far as to entertain within himself a picture of what his condition would be, if he should discover such an imposture when he was grown old. Whether a man so situated would be able to pluck away the result of so many years of usage, confidence, and belief, from the impostor, and endow a stranger with it?

But it was idle speculating thus. It couldn't happen. In a moment afterwards he determined that it could, but that such women were constantly observed, and had no opportunity given them for the accomplishment of such a design, even when they were so wicked as to entertain it. In another moment, he was remembering how few such cases seemed to have ever happened. In another moment he was wondering whether they ever happened and were not found out.

As his unusual emotion subsided, these misgivings gradually melted away, though so much of their shadow remained behind, that he was constant in his resolution to look closely after Richards himself, without appearing to do so. Being now in an easier frame of mind, he regarded the woman's station as rather an advantageous circumstance than otherwise, by placing, in itself, a broad distance between her and the child, and rendering their separation easy and natural. Thence he passed to the contemplation of the future glories of Dombey and Son, and dismissed the memory of his wife, for the time being, with a tributary sigh or two.

Meanwhile terms were ratified and agreed upon between Mrs Chick and Richards, with the assistance of Miss Tox; and Richards being with much ceremony invested with the Dombey baby, as if it were an Order, resigned her own, with many tears and kisses, to Jemima. Glasses of wine were then produced, to sustain the drooping spirits of the family; and Miss Tox, busying herself in dispensing 'tastes' to the younger branches, bred them up to their father's business with such surprising expedition, that she made chokers of four of them in a quarter of a minute.

'You'll take a glass yourself, Sir, won't you?' said Miss Tox, as Toodle appeared.

'Thankee, Mum,' said Toodle, 'since you are suppressing.'

'And you're very glad to leave your dear good wife in such a comfortable home, ain't you, Sir?' said Miss Tox, nodding and winking at him stealthily.

'No, Mum,' said Toodle. 'Here's wishing of her back agin.'

Polly cried more than ever at this. So Mrs Chick, who had her matronly apprehensions that this indulgence in grief might be prejudicial to the little Dombey ('acid, indeed,' she whispered Miss Tox), hastened to the rescue.

'Your little child will thrive charmingly with your sister Jemima, Richards,' said Mrs Chick; 'and you have only to make an effort — this is a world of effort, you

know, Richards — to be very happy indeed.

You have been already measured for your mourning, haven't you, Richards?'

'Ye — es, Ma'am,' sobbed Polly.

'And it'll fit beautifully. I know,' said Mrs Chick, 'for the same young person has made me many dresses. The very best materials, too!'

'Lor, you'll be so smart,' said Miss Tox, 'that your husband won't know you; will you, Sir?'

'I should know her,' said Toodle, gruffly, 'anyhows and anywheres.'

Toodle was evidently not to be bought over.

'As to living, Richards, you know,' pursued Mrs Chick, 'why, the very best of everything will be at your disposal. You will order your little dinner every day; and anything you take a fancy to, I'm sure will be as readily provided as if you were a Lady.'

'Yes to be sure!' said Miss Tox, keeping up the ball with great sympathy. 'And as to porter! — quite unlimited, will it not, Louisa?'

'Oh, certainly!' returned Mrs Chick in the same tone. 'With a little abstinence, you know, my dear, in point of vegetables.'

'And pickles, perhaps,' suggested Miss Tox.

'With such exceptions,' said Louisa, 'she'll consult her choice entirely, and be under no restraint at all, my love.'

'And then, of course, you know,' said Miss Tox,

'however fond she is of her own dear little child — and I'm sure, Louisa, you don't blame her for being fond of it?'

'Oh no!' cried Mrs Chick, benignantly.

'Still,' resumed Miss Tox, 'she naturally must be interested in her young charge, and must consider it a privilege to see a little cherub connected with the superior classes, gradually unfolding itself from day to day at one common fountain— is it not so, Louisa?'

'Most undoubtedly!' said Mrs Chick. 'You see, my love, she's already quite contented and comfortable, and means to say goodbye to her sister Jemima and her little pets, and her good honest husband, with a light heart and a smile; don't she, my dear?'

'Oh yes!' cried Miss Tox. 'To be sure she does!'

Notwithstanding which, however, poor Polly embraced them all round in great distress, and coming to her spouse at last, could not make up her mind to part from him, until he gently disengaged himself, at the close of the following allegorical piece of consolation: 'Polly, old 'ooman, whatever you do, my darling, hold up your head and fight low. That's the only rule as I know on, that'll carry anyone through life. You always have held up your head and fought low, Polly.

Do it now, or Bricks is no longer so. God bless you, Polly! Me and J'mima will do your duty by you; and with relating to your'n, hold up your head and fight

low, Polly, and you can't go wrong!'

Fortified by this golden secret, Folly finally ran away to avoid any more particular leave-taking between herself and the children. But the stratagem hardly succeeded as well as it deserved; for the smallest boy but one divining her intent, immediately began swarming upstairs after her — if that word of doubtful etymology be admissible — on his arms and legs; while the eldest (known in the family by the name of Biler, in remembrance of the steam engine) beat a demoniacal tattoo with his boots, expressive of grief; in which he was joined by the rest of the family.

A quantity of oranges and halfpence thrust indiscriminately on each young Toodle, checked the first violence of their regret, and the family were speedily transported to their own home, by means of the hackney-coach kept in waiting for that purpose. The children, under the guardianship of Jemima, blocked up the window, and dropped out oranges and halfpence all the way along. Mr Toodle himself preferred to ride behind among the spikes, as being the mode of conveyance to which he was best accustomed.

CHAPTER 3

**In which Mr Dombey, as a Man and a
Father, is seen at the Head of the
Home-Department**

The funeral of the deceased lady having been performed to the entire satisfaction of the undertaker, as well as of the neighbourhood at large, which is generally disposed to be captious on such a point, and is prone to take offence at any omissions or short-comings in the ceremonies, the various members of Mr Dombey's household subsided into their several places in the domestic system. That small world, like the great one out of doors, had the capacity of easily forgetting its dead; and when the cook had said she was a quiet-tempered lady, and the house-keeper had said it was the common lot, and the butler had said who'd have thought it, and the housemaid had said she couldn't hardly believe it, and the footman had said it seemed exactly like a dream, they had quite worn the subject out, and began to think their mourning was wearing rusty too.

On Richards, who was established upstairs in a state of honourable captivity, the dawn of her new life seemed to break cold and grey. Mr Dombey's house was a large one, on the shady side of a tall, dark, dreadfully genteel street in the region between Portland Place and Bryanstone Square.' It was a corner house, with great wide areas containing cellars frowned upon by barred windows, and leered at by crooked-eyed doors leading to dustbins. It was a house of dismal state, with a circular back to it, containing a whole suite

of drawing-rooms looking upon a gravelled yard, where two gaunt trees, with blackened trunks and branches, rattled rather than rustled, their leaves were so smoked-dried. The summer sun was never on the street, but in the morning about breakfast-time, when it came with the water-carts and the old clothes men, and the people with geraniums, and the umbrella-mender, and the man who trilled the little bell of the Dutch clock as he went along. It was soon gone again to return no more that day; and the bands of music and the straggling Punch's shows going after it, left it a prey to the most dismal of organs, and white mice; with now and then a porcupine, to vary the entertainments; until the butlers whose families were dining out, began to stand at the house-doors in the twilight, and the lamp-lighter made his nightly failure in attempting to brighten up the street with gas.

It was as blank a house inside as outside. When the funeral was over, Mr Dombey ordered the furniture to be covered up — perhaps to preserve it for the son with whom his plans were all associated — and the rooms to be ungarnished, saving such as he retained for himself on the ground floor. Accordingly, mysterious shapes were made of tables and chairs, heaped together in the middle of rooms, and covered over with great winding-sheets. Bell-handles, window-blinds, and looking-glasses, being papered up in journals, daily and weekly, obtruded fragmentary accounts of deaths and

dreadful murders. Every chandelier or lustre, muffled in holland, looked like a monstrous tear depending from the ceiling's eye. Odours, as from vaults and damp places, came out of the chimneys. The dead and buried lady was awful in a picture-frame of ghastly bandages. Every gust of wind that rose, brought eddying round the corner from the neighbouring mews, some fragments of the straw that had been strewn before the house when she was ill, mildewed remains of which were still cleaving to the neighbourhood: and these, being always drawn by some invisible attraction to the threshold of the dirty house to let immediately opposite, addressed a dismal eloquence to Mr Dombey's windows.

The apartments which Mr Dombey reserved for his own inhabiting, were attainable from the hall, and consisted of a sitting-room; a library, which was in fact a dressing-room, so that the smell of hot-pressed paper, vellum, morocco, and Russia leather, contended in it with the smell of divers pairs of boots; and a kind of conservatory or little glass breakfast-room beyond, commanding a prospect of the trees before mentioned, and, generally speaking, of a few prowling cats. These three rooms opened upon one another. In the morning, when Mr Dombey was at his breakfast in one or other of the two first-mentioned of them, as well as in the afternoon when he came home to dinner, a bell was rung for Richards to repair to this glass chamber, and there walk to and fro with her young charge. From the

glimpses she caught of Mr Dombey at these times, sitting in the dark distance, looking out towards the infant from among the dark heavy furniture — the house had been inhabited for years by his father, and in many of its appointments was old-fashioned and grim — she began to entertain ideas of him in his solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood. Mr Dombey came to be, in the course of a few days, invested in his own person, to her simple thinking, with all the mystery and gloom of his house. As she walked up and down the glass room, or sat hushing the baby there — which she very often did for hours together, when the dusk was closing in, too — she would sometimes try to pierce the gloom beyond, and make out how he was looking and what he was doing. Sensible that she was plainly to be seen by him' however, she never dared to pry in that direction but very furtively and for a moment at a time. Consequently she made out nothing, and Mr Dombey in his den remained a very shade.

Little Paul Dombey's foster-mother had led this life herself, and had carried little Paul through it for some weeks; and had returned upstairs one day from a melancholy saunter through the dreary rooms of state (she never went out without Mrs Chick, who called on fine mornings, usually accompanied by Miss Tox, to take her and Baby for an airing — or in other words, to

march them gravely up and down the pavement, like a walking funeral); when, as she was sitting in her own room, the door was slowly and quietly opened, and a dark-eyed little girl looked in.

'It's Miss Florence come home from her aunt's, no doubt,' thought Richards, who had never seen the child before. 'Hope I see you well, Miss.'

'Is that my brother?' asked the child, pointing to the Baby.

'Yes, my pretty,' answered Richards. 'Come and kiss him.'

But the child, instead of advancing, looked her earnestly in the face, and said: 'What have you done with my Mama?'

'Lord bless the little creeter!' cried Richards, 'what a sad question! I done? Nothing, Miss.'

'What have they done with my Mama?' inquired the child, with exactly the same look and manner.

'I never saw such a melting thing in all my life!' said Richards, who naturally substituted 'for this child one of her own, inquiring for herself in like circumstances. 'Come nearer here, my dear Miss!

Don't be afraid of me.'

'I am not afraid of you,' said the child, drawing nearer. 'But I want to know what they have done with my Mama.'

Her heart swelled so as she stood before the woman, looking into her eyes, that she was fain to press

her little hand upon her breast and hold it there. Yet there was a purpose in the child that prevented both her slender figure and her searching gaze from faltering.

'My darling,' said Richards, 'you wear that pretty black frock in remembrance of your Mama.'

'I can remember my Mama,' returned the child, with tears springing to her eyes, 'in any frock.'

'But people put on black, to remember people when they're gone.'

'Where gone?' asked the child.

'Come and sit down by me,' said Richards, 'and I'll tell you a story.'

With a quick perception that it was intended to relate to what she had asked, little Florence laid aside the bonnet she had held in her hand until now, and sat down on a stool at the Nurse's feet, looking up into her face.

'Once upon a time,' said Richards, 'there was a lady — a very good lady, and her little daughter dearly loved her.'

'A very good lady and her little daughter dearly loved her,' repeated the child.

'Who, when God thought it right that it should be so, was taken ill and died.'

The child shuddered.

'Died, never to be seen again by anyone on earth, and was buried in the ground where the trees grow.'

'The cold ground?' said the child, shuddering

again. 'No! The warm ground,' returned Polly, seizing her advantage, 'where the ugly little seeds turn into beautiful flowers, and into grass, and corn, and I don't know what all besides. Where good people turn into bright angels, and fly away to Heaven!'

The child, who had dropped her head, raised it again, and sat looking at her intently.

'So; let me see,' said Polly, not a little flurried between this earnest scrutiny, her desire to comfort the child, her sudden success, and her very slight confidence in her own powers.' So, when this lady died, wherever they took her, or wherever they put her, she went to GOD! and she prayed to Him, this lady did,' said Polly, affecting herself beyond measure; being heartily in earnest, 'to teach her little daughter to be sure of that in her heart: and to know that she was happy there and loved her still: and to hope and try — Oh, all her life — to meet her there one day, never, never, never to part any more.'

'It was my Mama!' exclaimed the child, springing up, and clasping her round the neck.

'And the child's heart,' said Polly, drawing her to her breast: 'the little daughter's heart was so full of the truth of this, that even when she heard it from a strange nurse that couldn't tell it right, but was a poor mother herself and that was all, she found a comfort in it — didn't feel so lonely — sobbed and cried upon her bosom — took kindly to the baby lying in her lap —

and — there, there, there!' said Polly, smoothing the child's curls and dropping tears upon them. 'There, poor dear!'

'Oh well, Miss Floy! And won't your Pa be angry neither!' cried a quick voice at the door, proceeding from a short, brown, womanly girl of fourteen, with a little snub nose, and black eyes like jet beads.

'When it was 'tickerlerly given out that you wasn't to go and worrit the wet nurse.

'She don't worry me,' was the surprised rejoinder of Polly. 'I am very fond of children.'

'Oh! but begging your pardon, Mrs Richards, that don't matter, you know,' returned the black-eyed girl, who was so desperately sharp and biting that she seemed to make one's eyes water. 'I may be very fond of pennywinkles, Mrs Richards, but it don't follow that I'm to have 'em for tea. 'Well, it don't matter,' said Polly. 'Oh, thank'ee, Mrs Richards, don't it!' returned the sharp girl. 'Remembering, however, if you'll be so good, that Miss Floy's under my charge, and Master Paul's under your'n.'

'But still we needn't quarrel,' said Polly.

'Oh no, Mrs Richards,' rejoined Spitfire. 'Not at all, I don't wish it, we needn't stand upon that footing, Miss Floy being a permanency, Master Paul a temporary.' Spitfire made use of none but comma pauses; shooting out whatever she had to say in one sentence, and in one breath, if possible.

'Miss Florence has just come home, hasn't she?' asked Polly.

'Yes, Mrs Richards, just come, and here, Miss Floy, before you've been in the house a quarter of an hour, you go a smearing your wet face against the expensive mourning that Mrs Richards is a wearing for your Ma!' With this remonstrance, young Spitfire, whose real name was Susan Nipper, detached the child from her new friend by a wrench — as if she were a tooth. But she seemed to do it, more in the excessively sharp exercise of her official functions, than with any deliberate unkindness.

'She'll be quite happy, now she has come home again,' said Polly, nodding to her with an encouraging smile upon her wholesome face, 'and will be so pleased to see her dear Papa to-night.'

'Lork, Mrs Richards!' cried Miss Nipper, taking up her words with a jerk. 'Don't. See her dear Papa indeed! I should like to see her do it!'

'Won't she then?' asked Polly.

'Lork, Mrs Richards, no, her Pa's a deal too wrapped up in somebody else, and before there was a somebody else to be wrapped up in she never was a favourite, girls are thrown away in this house, Mrs Richards, I assure you.

The child looked quickly from one nurse to the other, as if she understood and felt what was said.

'You surprise me!' cried Folly. 'Hasn't Mr

Dombey seen her since — '

'No,' interrupted Susan Nipper. 'Not once since, and he hadn't hardly set his eyes upon her before that for months and months, and I don't think he'd have known her for his own child if he had met her in the streets, or would know her for his own child if he was to meet her in the streets to-morrow, Mrs Richards, as to me,' said Spitfire, with a giggle, 'I doubt if he's aware of my existence.'

'Pretty dear!' said Richards; meaning, not Miss Nipper, but the little Florence.

'Oh! there's a Tartar within a hundred miles of where we're now in conversation, I can tell you, Mrs Richards, present company always excepted too,' said Susan Nipper; 'wish you good morning, Mrs Richards, now Miss Floy, you come along with me, and don't go hanging back like a naughty wicked child that judgments is no example to, don't!'

In spite of being thus adjured, and in spite also of some hauling on the part of Susan Nipper, tending towards the dislocation of her right shoulder, little Florence broke away, and kissed her new friend, affectionately.

'Oh dear! after it was given out so 'tickerlerly, that Mrs Richards wasn't to be made free with!' exclaimed Susan. 'Very well, Miss Floy!'

'God bless the sweet thing!' said Richards, 'Good-bye, dear!'

'Good-bye!' returned the child. 'God bless you! I shall come to see you again soon, and you'll come to see me? Susan will let us. Won't you, Susan?'

Spitfire seemed to be in the main a good-natured little body, although a disciple of that school of trainers of the young idea which holds that childhood, like money, must be shaken and rattled and jostled about a good deal to keep it bright. For, being thus appealed to with some endearing gestures and caresses, she folded her small arms and shook her head, and conveyed a relenting expression into her very-wide-open black eyes.

'It ain't right of you to ask it, Miss Floy, for you know I can't refuse you, but Mrs Richards and me will see what can be done, if Mrs Richards likes, I may wish, you see, to take a voyage to Chaney, Mrs Richards, but I mayn't know how to leave the London Docks.'

Richards assented to the proposition.

'This house ain't so exactly ringing with merry-making,' said Miss Nipper, 'that one need be lonelier than one must be. Your Toxes and your Chickses may draw out my two front double teeth, Mrs Richards, but that's no reason why I need offer 'em the whole set.'

This proposition was also assented to by Richards, as an obvious one.

'So I'm able, I'm sure,' said Susan Nipper, 'to live

friendly, Mrs Richards, while Master Paul continues a permanency, if the means can be planned out without going openly against orders, but goodness gracious Miss Floy, you haven't got your things off yet, you naughty child, you haven't, come along!'

With these words, Susan Nipper, in a transport of coercion, made a charge at her young ward, and swept her out of the room.

The child, in her grief and neglect, was so gentle, so quiet, and uncomplaining; was possessed of so much affection that no one seemed to care to have, and so much sorrowful intelligence that no one seemed to mind or think about the wounding of, that Polly's heart was sore when she was left alone again. In the simple passage that had taken place between herself and the motherless little girl, her own motherly heart had been touched no less than the child's; and she felt, as the child did, that there was something of confidence and interest between them from that moment.

Notwithstanding Mr Toodle's great reliance on Polly, she was perhaps in point of artificial accomplishments very little his superior. She had been good-humouredly working and drudging for her life all her life, and was a sober steady-going person, with matter-of-fact ideas about the butcher and baker, and the division of pence into farthings. But she was a good plain sample of a nature that is ever, in the mass, better, truer, higher, nobler, quicker to feel, and much more

constant to retain, all tenderness and pity, self-denial and devotion, than the nature of men. And, perhaps, unlearned as she was, she could have brought a dawning knowledge home to Mr Dombey at that early day, which would not then have struck him in the end like lightning.

But this is from the purpose. Polly only thought, at that time, of improving on her successful propitiation of Miss Nipper, and devising some means of having little Florence aide her, lawfully, and without rebellion. An opening happened to present itself that very night.

She had been rung down into the glass room as usual, and had walked about and about it a long time, with the baby in her arms, when, to her great surprise and dismay, Mr Dombey — whom she had seen at first leaning on his elbow at the table, and afterwards walking up and down the middle room, drawing, each time, a little nearer, she thought, to the open folding doors — came out, suddenly, and stopped before her.

'Good evening, Richards.'

Just the same austere, stiff gentleman, as he had appeared to her on that first day. Such a hard-looking gentleman, that she involuntarily dropped her eyes and her curtsy at the same time.

'How is Master Paul, Richards?'

'Quite thriving, Sir, and well.'

'He looks so,' said Mr Dombey, glancing with great interest at the tiny face she uncovered for his

observation, and yet affecting to be half careless of it. 'They give you everything you want, I hope?'

'Oh yes, thank you, Sir.'

She suddenly appended such an obvious hesitation to this reply, however, that Mr Dombey, who had turned away; stopped, and turned round again, inquiringly.

'If you please, Sir, the child is very much disposed to take notice of things,' said Richards, with another curtsy, 'and — upstairs is a little dull for him, perhaps, Sir.'

'I begged them to take you out for airings, constantly,' said Mr Dombey. 'Very well! You shall go out oftener. You're quite right to mention it.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' faltered Polly, 'but we go out quite plenty Sir, thank you.'

'What would you have then?' asked Mr Dombey.

'Indeed Sir, I don't exactly know,' said Polly, 'unless —'

'Yes?'

'I believe nothing is so good for making children lively and cheerful, Sir, as seeing other children playing about 'em,' observed Polly, taking courage.

'I think I mentioned to you, Richards, when you came here,' said Mr Dombey, with a frown, 'that I wished you to see as little of your family as possible.'

'Oh dear yes, Sir, I wasn't so much as thinking of that.'

'I am glad of it,' said Mr Dombey hastily. 'You can continue your walk if you please.'

With that, he disappeared into his inner room; and Polly had the satisfaction of feeling that he had thoroughly misunderstood her object, and that she had fallen into disgrace without the least advancement of her purpose.

Next night, she found him walking about the conservatory when she came down. As she stopped at the door, checked by this unusual sight, and uncertain whether to advance or retreat, he called her in. His mind was too much set on Dombey and Son, it soon appeared, to admit of his having forgotten her suggestion.

'If you really think that sort of society is good for the child,' he said sharply, as if there had been no interval since she proposed it, 'where's Miss Florence?'

'Nothing could be better than Miss Florence, Sir,' said Polly eagerly, 'but I understood from her maid that they were not to —'

Mr Dombey rang the bell, and walked till it was answered.

'Tell them always to let Miss Florence be with Richards when she chooses, and go out with her, and so forth. Tell them to let the children be together, when Richards wishes it.'

The iron was now hot, and Richards striking on it boldly — it was a good cause and she bold in it, though

instinctively afraid of Mr Dombey — requested that Miss Florence might be sent down then and there, to make friends with her little brother.

She feigned to be dandling the child as the servant retired on this errand, but she thought that she saw Mr Dombey's colour changed; that the expression of his face quite altered; that he turned, hurriedly, as if to gainsay what he had said, or she had said, or both, and was only deterred by very shame.

And she was right. The last time he had seen his slighted child, there had been that in the sad embrace between her and her dying mother, which was at once a revelation and a reproach to him. Let him be absorbed as he would in the Son on whom he built such high hopes, he could not forget that closing scene. He could not forget that he had had no part in it. That, at the bottom of its clear depths of tenderness and truth' lay those two figures clasped in each other's arms, while he stood on the bank above them, looking down a mere spectator — not a sharer with them — quite shut out.

Unable to exclude these things from his remembrance, or to keep his mind free from such imperfect shapes of the meaning with which they were fraught, as were able to make themselves visible to him through the mist of his pride, his previous feeling of indifference towards little Florence changed into an uneasiness of an extraordinary kind.

Young as she was, and possessing in any eyes but

his (and perhaps in his too) even more than the usual amount of childish simplicity and confidence, he almost felt as if she watched and distrusted him. As if she held the clue to something secret in his breast, of the nature of which he was hardly informed himself. As if she had an innate knowledge of one jarring and discordant string within him, and her very breath could sound it.

His feeling about the child had been negative from her birth. He had never conceived an aversion to her: it had not been worth his while or in his humour. She had never been a positively disagreeable object to him. But now he was ill at ease about her. She troubled his peace. He would have preferred to put her idea aside altogether, if he had known how. Perhaps — who shall decide on such mysteries! — he was afraid that he might come to hate her.

When little Florence timidly presented herself, Mr Dombey stopped in his pacing up and down and looked towards her. Had he looked with greater interest and with a father's eye, he might have read in her keen glance the impulses and fears that made her waver; the passionate desire to run clinging to him, crying, as she hid her face in his embrace, 'Oh father, try to love me! there's no one else!' the dread of a repulse; the fear of being too bold, and of offending him; the pitiable need in which she stood of some assurance and encouragement; and how her overcharged young heart was wandering to find some natural resting-place, for

its sorrow and affection.

But he saw nothing of this. He saw her pause irresolutely at the door and look towards him; and he saw no more.

'Come in,' he said, 'come in: what is the child afraid of?'

She came in; and after glancing round her for a moment with an uncertain air, stood pressing her small hands hard together, close within the door.

'Come here, Florence,' said her father, coldly. 'Do you know who I am?'

'Yes, Papa.'

'Have you nothing to say to me?'

The tears that stood in her eyes as she raised them quickly to his face, were frozen by the expression it wore. She looked down again, and put out her trembling hand.

Mr Dombey took it loosely in his own, and stood looking down upon her for a moment, as if he knew as little as the child, what to say or do.

'There! Be a good girl,' he said, patting her on the head, and regarding her as it were by stealth with a disturbed and doubtful look. 'Go to Richards! Go!'

His little daughter hesitated for another instant as though she would have clung about him still, or had some lingering hope that he might raise her in his arms and kiss her. She looked up in his face once more. He thought how like her expression was then, to what it

had been when she looked round at the Doctor — that night — and instinctively dropped her hand and turned away.

It was not difficult to perceive that Florence was at a great disadvantage in her father's presence. It was not only a constraint upon the child's mind, but even upon the natural grace and freedom of her actions. As she sported and played about her baby brother that night, her manner was seldom so winning and so pretty as it naturally was, and sometimes when in his pacing to and fro, he came near her (she had, perhaps, for the moment, forgotten him) it changed upon the instant and became forced and embarrassed.

Still, Polly persevered with all the better heart for seeing this; and, judging of Mr Dombey by herself, had great confidence in the mute appeal of poor little Florence's mourning dress.' It's hard indeed,' thought Polly, 'if he takes only to one little motherless child, when he has another, and that a girl, before his eyes.'

So, Polly kept her before his eyes, as long as she could, and managed so well with little Paul, as to make it very plain that he was all the livelier for his sister's company. When it was time to withdraw upstairs again, she would have sent Florence into the inner room to say good-night to her father, but the child was timid and drew back; and when she urged her again, said, spreading her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out her own unworthiness, 'Oh no, no! He don't want me.'

He don't want me!

The little altercation between them had attracted the notice of Mr Dombey, who inquired from the table where he was sitting at his wine, what the matter was.

'Miss Florence was afraid of interrupting, Sir, if she came in to say good-night,' said Richards.

'It doesn't matter,' returned Mr Dombey. 'You can let her come and go without regarding me.'

The child shrunk as she listened — and was gone, before her humble friend looked round again.

However, Polly triumphed not a little in the success of her well-intentioned scheme, and in the address with which she had brought it to bear: whereof she made a full disclosure to Spitfire when she was once more safely entrenched upstairs. Miss Nipper received that proof of her confidence, as well as the prospect of their free association for the future, rather coldly, and was anything but enthusiastic in her demonstrations of joy.

'I thought you would have been pleased,' said Polly.

'Oh yes, Mrs Richards, I'm very well pleased, thank you,' returned Susan, who had suddenly become so very upright that she seemed to have put an additional bone in her stays.

'You don't show it,' said Polly.

'Oh! Being only a permanency I couldn't be expected to show it like a temporary,' said Susan

Nipper. 'Temporaries carries it all before 'em here, I find, but though there's a excellent party-wall between this house and the next, I mayn't exactly like to go to it, Mrs Richards, notwithstanding!'

CHAPTER 4

In which some more First Appearances are made on the Stage of these Adventures

Though the offices of Dombey and Son were within the liberties of the City of London, and within hearing of Bow Bells, when their clashing voices were not drowned by the uproar in the streets, yet were there hints of adventurous and romantic story to be observed in some of the adjacent objects. Gog and Magog held their state within ten minutes' walk; the Royal Exchange was close at hand; the Bank of England, with its vaults of gold and silver 'down among the dead men' underground, was their magnificent neighbour. Just round the corner stood the rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets, with their slippers very much turned up at the toes. Anywhere in the immediate vicinity there might be seen pictures of ships speeding

away full sail to all parts of the world; outfitting warehouses ready to pack off anybody anywhere, fully equipped in half an hour; and little timber midshipmen in obsolete naval uniforms, eternally employed outside the shop doors of nautical Instrument-makers in taking observations of the hackney carriages.

Sole master and proprietor of one of these effigies — of that which might be called, familiarly, the woodenest — of that which thrust itself out above the pavement, right leg foremost, with a suavity the least endurable, and had the shoe buckles and flapped waistcoat the least reconcilable to human reason, and bore at its right eye the most offensively disproportionate piece of machinery — sole master and proprietor of that Midshipman, and proud of him too, an elderly gentleman in a Welsh wig had paid house-rent, taxes, rates, and dues, for more years than many a full-grown midshipman of flesh and blood has numbered in his life; and midshipmen who have attained a pretty green old age, have not been wanting in the English Navy.

The stock-in-trade of this old gentleman comprised chronometers, barometers, telescopes, compasses, charts, maps, sextants, quadrants, and specimens of every kind of instrument used in the working of a ship's course, or the keeping of a ship's reckoning, or the prosecuting of a ship's discoveries. Objects in brass and glass were in his drawers and on

his shelves, which none but the initiated could have found the top of, or guessed the use of, or having once examined, could have ever got back again into their mahogany nests without assistance. Everything was jammed into the tightest cases, fitted into the narrowest corners, fenced up behind the most impertinent cushions, and screwed into the acutest angles, to prevent its philosophical composure from being disturbed by the rolling of the sea. Such extraordinary precautions were taken in every instance to save room, and keep the thing compact; and so much practical navigation was fitted, and cushioned, and screwed into every box (whether the box was a mere slab, as some were, or something between a cocked hat and a star-fish, as others were, and those quite mild and modest boxes as compared with others); that the shop itself, partaking of the general infection, seemed almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern, wanting only good sea-room, in the event of an unexpected launch, to work its way securely to any desert island in the world.

Many minor incidents in the household life of the Ships'

Instrument-maker who was proud of his little Midshipman, assisted and bore out this fancy. His acquaintance lying chiefly among ship-chandlers and so forth, he had always plenty of the veritable ships' biscuit on his table. It was familiar with dried meats

and tongues, possessing an extraordinary flavour of rope yarn. Pickles were produced upon it, in great wholesale jars, with 'dealer in all kinds of Ships' Provisions' on the label; spirits were set forth in case bottles with no throats. Old prints of ships with alphabetical references to their various mysteries, hung in frames upon the walls; the Tartar Frigate under weigh, was on the plates; outlandish shells, seaweeds, and mosses, decorated the chimney-piece; the little wainscotted back parlour was lighted by a sky-light, like a cabin.

Here he lived too, in skipper-like state, all alone with his nephew Walter: a boy of fourteen who looked quite enough like a midshipman, to carry out the prevailing idea. But there it ended, for Solomon Gills himself (more generally called old Sol) was far from having a maritime appearance. To say nothing of his Welsh wig, which was as plain and stubborn a Welsh wig as ever was worn, and in which he looked like anything but a Rover, he was a slow, quiet-spoken, thoughtful old fellow, with eyes as red as if they had been small suns looking at you through a fog; and a newly-awakened manner, such as he might have acquired by having stared for three or four days successively through every optical instrument in his shop, and suddenly came back to the world again, to find it green. The only change ever known in his outward man, was from a complete suit of

coffee-colour cut very square, and ornamented with glaring buttons, to the same suit of coffee-colour minus the inexpressibles, which were then of a pale nankeen. He wore a very precise shirt-frill, and carried a pair of first-rate spectacles on his forehead, and a tremendous chronometer in his fob, rather than doubt which precious possession, he would have believed in a conspiracy against it on part of all the clocks and watches in the City, and even of the very Sun itself. Such as he was, such he had been in the shop and parlour behind the little Midshipman, for years upon years; going regularly aloft to bed every night in a howling garret remote from the lodgers, where, when gentlemen of England who lived below at ease had little or no idea of the state of the weather, it often blew great guns.

It is half-past five o'clock, and an autumn afternoon, when the reader and Solomon Gills become acquainted. Solomon Gills is in the act of seeing what time it is by the unimpeachable chronometer. The usual daily clearance has been making in the City for an hour or more; and the human tide is still rolling westward. 'The streets have thinned,' as Mr Gills says, 'very much.' It threatens to be wet to-night. All the weatherglasses in the shop are in low spirits, and the rain already shines upon the cocked hat of the wooden Midshipman.

'Where's Walter, I wonder!' said Solomon Gills, after he had carefully put up the chronometer again.

'Here's dinner been ready, half an hour, and no Walter!'

Turning round upon his stool behind the counter, Mr Gills looked out among the instruments in the window, to see if his nephew might be crossing the road. No. He was not among the bobbing umbrellas, and he certainly was not the newspaper boy in the oilskin cap who was slowly working his way along the piece of brass outside, writing his name over Mr Gills's name with his forefinger.

'If I didn't know he was too fond of me to make a run of it, and go and enter himself aboard ship against my wishes, I should begin to be fidgetty,' said Mr Gills, tapping two or three weather-glasses with his knuckles. 'I really should. All in the Downs, eh! Lots of moisture! Well! it's wanted.'

I believe,' said Mr Gills, blowing the dust off the glass top of a compass-case, 'that you don't point more direct and due to the back parlour than the boy's inclination does after all. And the parlour couldn't bear straighter either. Due north. Not the twentieth part of a point either way.'

'Halloa, Uncle Sol!'

'Halloa, my boy!' cried the Instrument-maker, turning briskly round. 'What! you are here, are you?'

A cheerful looking, merry boy, fresh with running home in the rain; fair-faced, bright-eyed, and curly-haired.

'Well, Uncle, how have you got on without me all

day? Is dinner ready? I'm so hungry.'

'As to getting on,' said Solomon good-naturedly, 'it would be odd if I couldn't get on without a young dog like you a great deal better than with you. As to dinner being ready, it's been ready this half hour and waiting for you. As to being hungry, I am!'

'Come along then, Uncle!' cried the boy. 'Hurrah for the admiral!'

'Confound the admiral!' returned Solomon Gills. 'You mean the Lord Mayor.'

'No I don't!' cried the boy. 'Hurrah for the admiral! Hurrah for the admiral! For-ward!'

At this word of command, the Welsh wig and its wearer were borne without resistance into the back parlour, as at the head of a boarding party of five hundred men; and Uncle Sol and his nephew were speedily engaged on a fried sole with a prospect of steak to follow.

'The Lord Mayor, Wally,' said Solomon, 'for ever! No more admirals.

The Lord Mayor's your admiral.'

'Oh, is he though!' said the boy, shaking his head. 'Why, the Sword Bearer's better than him. He draws his sword sometimes.

'And a pretty figure he cuts with it for his pains,' returned the Uncle. 'Listen to me, Wally, listen to me. Look on the mantelshelf.'

'Why who has cocked my silver mug up there, on

a nail?' exclaimed the boy.

I have,' said his Uncle. 'No more mugs now. We must begin to drink out of glasses to-day, Walter. We are men of business. We belong to the City. We started in life this morning.

'Well, Uncle,' said the boy, 'I'll drink out of anything you like, so long as I can drink to you. Here's to you, Uncle Sol, and Hurrah for the 'Lord Mayor,' interrupted the old man.

'For the Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, Common Council, and Livery,' said the boy. 'Long life to 'em!'

The uncle nodded his head with great satisfaction. 'And now,' he said, 'let's hear something about the Firm.'

'Oh! there's not much to be told about the Firm, Uncle,' said the boy, plying his knife and fork.' It's a precious dark set of offices, and in the room where I sit, there's a high fender, and an iron safe, and some cards about ships that are going to sail, and an almanack, and some desks and stools, and an inkbottle, and some books, and some boxes, and a lot of cobwebs, and in one of 'em, just over my head, a shrivelled-up blue-bottle that looks as if it had hung there ever so long.'

'Nothing else?' said the Uncle.

'No, nothing else, except an old birdcage (I wonder how that ever came there!) and a coal-scuttle.'

'No bankers' books, or cheque books, or bills, or

such tokens of wealth rolling in from day to day?' said old Sol, looking wistfully at his nephew out of the fog that always seemed to hang about him, and laying an unctuous emphasis upon the words.

'Oh yes, plenty of that I suppose,' returned his nephew carelessly; 'but all that sort of thing's in Mr Carker's room, or Mr Morfin's, or MR Dombey's.'

'Has Mr Dombey been there to-day?' inquired the Uncle.

'Oh yes! In and out all day.'

'He didn't take any notice of you, I suppose?'

'Yes he did. He walked up to my seat, — I wish he wasn't so solemn and stiff, Uncle, — and said, "Oh! you are the son of Mr Gills the Ships' Instrument-maker." "Nephew, Sir," I said. "I said nephew, boy," said he. But I could take my oath he said son, Uncle.'

'You're mistaken I daresay. It's no matter.

'No, it's no matter, but he needn't have been so sharp, I thought.

There was no harm in it though he did say son. Then he told me that you had spoken to him about me, and that he had found me employment in the House accordingly, and that I was expected to be attentive and punctual, and then he went away. I thought he didn't seem to like me much.'

'You mean, I suppose,' observed the Instrument-maker, 'that you didn't seem to like him

much?'

'Well, Uncle,' returned the boy, laughing. 'Perhaps so; I never thought of that.'

Solomon looked a little graver as he finished his dinner, and glanced from time to time at the boy's bright face. When dinner was done, and the cloth was cleared away (the entertainment had been brought from a neighbouring eating-house), he lighted a candle, and went down below into a little cellar, while his nephew, standing on the mouldy staircase, dutifully held the light. After a moment's groping here and there, he presently returned with a very ancient-looking bottle, covered with dust and dirt.

'Why, Uncle Sol!' said the boy, 'what are you about? that's the wonderful Madeira! — there's only one more bottle!'

Uncle Sol nodded his head, implying that he knew very well what he was about; and having drawn the cork in solemn silence, filled two glasses and set the bottle and a third clean glass on the table.

'You shall drink the other bottle, Wally,' he said, 'when you come to good fortune; when you are a thriving, respected, happy man; when the start in life you have made to-day shall have brought you, as I pray Heaven it may! — to a smooth part of the course you have to run, my child. My love to you!'

Some of the fog that hung about old Sol seemed to have got into his throat; for he spoke huskily. His

hand shook too, as he clinked his glass against his nephew's. But having once got the wine to his lips, he tossed it off like a man, and smacked them afterwards.

'Dear Uncle,' said the boy, affecting to make light of it, while the tears stood in his eyes, 'for the honour you have done me, et cetera, et cetera. I shall now beg to propose Mr Solomon Gills with three times three and one cheer more. Hurrah! and you'll return thanks, Uncle, when we drink the last bottle together; won't you?'

They clinked their glasses again; and Walter, who was hoarding his wine, took a sip of it, and held the glass up to his eye with as critical an air as he could possibly assume.

His Uncle sat looking at him for some time in silence. When their eyes at last met, he began at once to pursue the theme that had occupied his thoughts, aloud, as if he had been speaking all the time.

'You see, Walter,' he said, 'in truth this business is merely a habit with me. I am so accustomed to the habit that I could hardly live if I relinquished it: but there's nothing doing, nothing doing.

When that uniform was worn,' pointing out towards the little Midshipman, 'then indeed, fortunes were to be made, and were made. But competition, competition — new invention, new invention — alteration, alteration — the world's gone past me. I hardly know where I am myself, much less where my

customers are.

'Never mind 'em, Uncle!'

'Since you came home from weekly boarding-school at Peckham, for instance — and that's ten days,' said Solomon, 'I don't remember more than one person that has come into the shop.'

'Two, Uncle, don't you recollect? There was the man who came to ask for change for a sovereign —'

'That's the one,' said Solomon.

'Why Uncle! don't you call the woman anybody, who came to ask the way to Mile-End Turnpike?'

'Oh! it's true,' said Solomon, 'I forgot her. Two persons.'

'To be sure, they didn't buy anything,' cried the boy.

'No. They didn't buy anything,' said Solomon, quietly.

'Nor want anything,' cried the boy.

'No. If they had, they'd gone to another shop,' said Solomon, in the same tone.

'But there were two of 'em, Uncle,' cried the boy, as if that were a great triumph. 'You said only one.'

'Well, Wally,' resumed the old man, after a short pause: 'not being like the Savages who came on Robinson Crusoe's Island, we can't live on a man who asks for change for a sovereign, and a woman who inquires the way to Mile-End Turnpike. As I said just now, the world has gone past me. I don't blame it; but I

no longer understand it. Tradesmen are not the same as they used to be, apprentices are not the same, business is not the same, business commodities are not the same.

Seven-eighths of my stock is old-fashioned. I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it. I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again. Even the noise it makes a long way ahead, confuses me.'

Walter was going to speak, but his Uncle held up his hand.

'Therefore, Wally — therefore it is that I am anxious you should be early in the busy world, and on the world's track. I am only the ghost of this business — its substance vanished long ago; and when I die, its ghost will be laid. As it is clearly no inheritance for you then, I have thought it best to use for your advantage, almost the only fragment of the old connexion that stands by me, through long habit.

Some people suppose me to be wealthy. I wish for your sake they were right. But whatever I leave behind me, or whatever I can give you, you in such a House as Dombey's are in the road to use well and make the most of. Be diligent, try to like it, my dear boy, work for a steady independence, and be happy!'

'I'll do everything I can, Uncle, to deserve your affection. Indeed I will,' said the boy, earnestly 'I know it,' said Solomon. 'I am sure of it,' and he applied himself to a second glass of the old Madeira, with

increased relish.

'As to the Sea,' he pursued, 'that's well enough in fiction, Wally, but it won't do in fact: it won't do at all. It's natural enough that you should think about it, associating it with all these familiar things; but it won't do, it won't do.'

Solomon Gills rubbed his hands with an air of stealthy enjoyment, as he talked of the sea, though; and looked on the seafaring objects about him with inexpressible complacency.

'Think of this wine for instance,' said old Sol, 'which has been to the East Indies and back, I'm not able to say how often, and has been once round the world. Think of the pitch-dark nights, the roaring winds, and rolling seas:'

'The thunder, lightning, rain, hail, storm of all kinds,' said the boy.

'To be sure,' said Solomon, — 'that this wine has passed through.

Think what a straining and creaking of timbers and masts: what a whistling and howling of the gale through ropes and rigging:'

'What a clambering aloft of men, vying with each other who shall lie out first upon the yards to furl the icy sails, while the ship rolls and pitches, like mad!' cried his nephew.

'Exactly so,' said Solomon: 'has gone on, over the old cask that held this wine. Why, when the Charming

Sally went down in the — '

'In the Baltic Sea, in the dead of night; five-and-twenty minutes past twelve when the captain's watch stopped in his pocket; he lying dead against the main-mast — on the fourteenth of February, seventeen forty-nine!' cried Walter, with great animation.

'Ay, to be sure!' cried old Sol, 'quite right! Then, there were five hundred casks of such wine aboard; and all hands (except the first mate, first lieutenant, two seamen, and a lady, in a leaky boat) going to work to stave the casks, got drunk and died drunk, singing "Rule Britannia", when she settled and went down, and ending with one awful scream in chorus.'

'But when the George the Second drove ashore, Uncle, on the coast of Cornwall, in a dismal gale, two hours before daybreak, on the fourth of March, 'seventy-one, she had near two hundred horses aboard; and the horses breaking loose down below, early in the gale, and tearing to and fro, and trampling each other to death, made such noises, and set up such human cries, that the crew believing the ship to be full of devils, some of the best men, losing heart and head, went overboard in despair, and only two were left alive, at last, to tell the tale.'

'And when,' said old Sol, 'when the Polyphemus — '

'Private West India Trader, burden three hundred and fifty tons, Captain, John Brown of Deptford.

Owners, Wiggs and Co.,' cried Walter.

'The same,' said Sol; 'when she took fire, four days' sail with a fair wind out of Jamaica Harbour, in the night —'

'There were two brothers on board,' interposed his nephew, speaking very fast and loud, 'and there not being room for both of them in the only boat that wasn't swamped, neither of them would consent to go, until the elder took the younger by the waist, and flung him in. And then the younger, rising in the boat, cried out, "Dear Edward, think of your promised wife at home. I'm only a boy. No one waits at home for me. Leap down into my place!" and flung himself in the sea!'

The kindling eye and heightened colour of the boy, who had risen from his seat in the earnestness of what he said and felt, seemed to remind old Sol of something he had forgotten, or that his encircling mist had hitherto shut out. Instead of proceeding with any more anecdotes, as he had evidently intended but a moment before, he gave a short dry cough, and said, 'Well! suppose we change the subject.'

The truth was, that the simple-minded Uncle in his secret attraction towards the marvellous and adventurous — of which he was, in some sort, a distant relation, by his trade — had greatly encouraged the same attraction in the nephew; and that everything that had ever been put before the boy to deter him from a life of adventure, had had the usual unaccountable

effect of sharpening his taste for it. This is invariable. It would seem as if there never was a book written, or a story told, expressly with the object of keeping boys on shore, which did not lure and charm them to the ocean, as a matter of course.

But an addition to the little party now made its appearance, in the shape of a gentleman in a wide suit of blue, with a hook instead of a hand attached to his right wrist; very bushy black eyebrows; and a thick stick in his left hand, covered all over (like his nose) with knobs. He wore a loose black silk handkerchief round his neck, and such a very large coarse shirt collar, that it looked like a small sail. He was evidently the person for whom the spare wine-glass was intended, and evidently knew it; for having taken off his rough outer coat, and hung up, on a particular peg behind the door, such a hard glazed hat as a sympathetic person's head might ache at the sight of, and which left a red rim round his own forehead as if he had been wearing a tight basin, he brought a chair to where the clean glass was, and sat himself down behind it. He was usually addressed as Captain, this visitor; and had been a pilot, or a skipper, or a privateersman, or all three perhaps; and was a very salt-looking man indeed.

His face, remarkable for a brown solidity, brightened as he shook hands with Uncle and nephew; but he seemed to be of a laconic disposition, and merely said: 'How goes it?'

'All well,' said Mr Gills, pushing the bottle towards him.

He took it up, and having surveyed and smelt it, said with extraordinary expression: 'The?'

'The,' returned the Instrument-maker.

Upon that he whistled as he filled his glass, and seemed to think they were making holiday indeed.

'Wal'r!' he said, arranging his hair (which was thin) with his hook, and then pointing it at the Instrument-maker, 'Look at him!

Love! Honour! And Obey! Overhaul your catechism till you find that passage, and when found turn the leaf down. Success, my boy!'

He was so perfectly satisfied both with his quotation and his reference to it, that he could not help repeating the words again in a low voice, and saying he had forgotten 'em these forty year.

'But I never wanted two or three words in my life that I didn't know where to lay my hand upon 'em, Gills,' he observed. 'It comes of not wasting language as some do.'

The reflection perhaps reminded him that he had better, like young Norval's father, "increase his store." At any rate he became silent, and remained so, until old Sol went out into the shop to light it up, when he turned to Walter, and said, without any introductory remark: 'I suppose he could make a clock if he tried?'

'I shouldn't wonder, Captain Cuttle,' returned the

boy.

'And it would go!' said Captain Cuttle, making a species of serpent in the air with his hook. 'Lord, how that clock would go!'

For a moment or two he seemed quite lost in contemplating the pace of this ideal timepiece, and sat looking at the boy as if his face were the dial.

'But he's chockful of science,' he observed, waving his hook towards the stock-in-trade. 'Look'ye here! Here's a collection of 'em.

Earth, air, or water. It's all one. Only say where you'll have it. Up in a balloon? There you are. Down in a bell? There you are. D'ye want to put the North Star in a pair of scales and weigh it? He'll do it for you.'

It may be gathered from these remarks that Captain Cuttle's reverence for the stock of instruments was profound, and that his philosophy knew little or no distinction between trading in it and inventing it.

'Ah!' he said, with a sigh, 'it's a fine thing to understand 'em.

And yet it's a fine thing not to understand 'em. I hardly know which is best. It's so comfortable to sit here and feel that you might be weighed, measured, magnified, electrified, polarized, played the very devil with: and never know how.'

Nothing short of the wonderful Madeira, combined with the occasion (which rendered it desirable to improve and expand Walter's mind), could

have ever loosened his tongue to the extent of giving utterance to this prodigious oration. He seemed quite amazed himself at the manner in which it opened up to view the sources of the taciturn delight he had had in eating Sunday dinners in that parlour for ten years. Becoming a sadder and a wiser man, he mused and held his peace.

'Come!' cried the subject of this admiration, returning. 'Before you have your glass of grog, Ned, we must finish the bottle.'

'Stand by!' said Ned, filling his glass. 'Give the boy some more.'

'No more, thank'e, Uncle!'

'Yes, yes,' said Sol, 'a little more. We'll finish the bottle, to the House, Ned — Walter's House. Why it may be his House one of these days, in part. Who knows? Sir Richard Whittington married his master's daughter.'

'''Turn again Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and when you are old you will never depart from it,''' interposed the Captain. 'Wal'r!

Overhaul the book, my lad.'

'And although Mr Dombey hasn't a daughter,' Sol began.

'Yes, yes, he has, Uncle,' said the boy, reddening and laughing.

'Has he?' cried the old man. 'Indeed I think he has too.'

'Oh! I know he has,' said the boy. 'Some of 'em were talking about it in the office today. And they do say, Uncle and Captain Cuttle,' lowering his voice, 'that he's taken a dislike to her, and that she's left, unnoticed, among the servants, and that his mind's so set all the while upon having his son in the House, that although he's only a baby now, he is going to have balances struck oftener than formerly, and the books kept closer than they used to be, and has even been seen (when he thought he wasn't) walking in the Docks, looking at his ships and property and all that, as if he was exulting like, over what he and his son will possess together. That's what they say. Of course, I don't know.

'He knows all about her already, you see,' said the instrument-maker.

'Nonsense, Uncle,' cried the boy, still reddening and laughing, boy-like. 'How can I help hearing what they tell me?'

'The Son's a little in our way at present, I'm afraid, Ned,' said the old man, humouring the joke.

'Very much,' said the Captain.

'Nevertheless, we'll drink him,' pursued Sol. 'So, here's to Dombey and Son.'

'Oh, very well, Uncle,' said the boy, merrily. 'Since you have introduced the mention of her, and have connected me with her and have said that I know all about her, I shall make bold to amend the toast.

So here's to Dombey — and Son — and

Daughter!

CHAPTER 5

Paul's Progress and Christening

Little Paul, suffering no contamination from the blood of the Toodles, grew stouter and stronger every day. Every day, too, he was more and more ardently cherished by Miss Tox, whose devotion was so far appreciated by Mr Dombey that he began to regard her as a woman of great natural good sense, whose feelings did her credit and deserved encouragement. He was so lavish of this condescension, that he not only bowed to her, in a particular manner, on several occasions, but even entrusted such stately recognitions of her to his sister as 'pray tell your friend, Louisa, that she is very good,' or 'mention to Miss Tox, Louisa, that I am obliged to her;' specialities which made a deep impression on the lady thus distinguished.

Whether Miss Tox conceived that having been selected by the Fates to welcome the little Dombey before he was born, in Kirby, Beard and Kirby's Best Mixed Pins, it therefore naturally devolved upon her to greet him with all other forms of welcome in all other early stages of his existence — or whether her overflowing goodness induced her to volunteer into the domestic militia as a substitute in some sort for his deceased Mama — or whether she was conscious of

any other motives — are questions which in this stage of the Firm's history herself only could have solved. Nor have they much bearing on the fact (of which there is no doubt), that Miss Tox's constancy and zeal were a heavy discouragement to Richards, who lost flesh hourly under her patronage, and was in some danger of being superintended to death.

Miss Tox was often in the habit of assuring Mrs Chick, that nothing could exceed her interest in all connected with the development of that sweet child; and an observer of Miss Tox's proceedings might have inferred so much without declaratory confirmation. She would preside over the innocent repasts of the young heir, with ineffable satisfaction, almost with an air of joint proprietorship with Richards in the entertainment. At the little ceremonies of the bath and toilette, she assisted with enthusiasm. The administration of infantine doses of physic awakened all the active sympathy of her character; and being on one occasion secreted in a cupboard (whither she had fled in modesty), when Mr Dombey was introduced into the nursery by his sister, to behold his son, in the course of preparation for bed, taking a short walk uphill over Richards's gown, in a short and airy linen jacket, Miss Tox was so transported beyond the ignorant present as to be unable to refrain from crying out, 'Is he not beautiful Mr Dombey! Is he not a Cupid, Sir!' and then almost sinking behind the closet door with confusion

and blushes.

'Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, one day, to his sister, 'I really think I must present your friend with some little token, on the occasion of Paul's christening. She has exerted herself so warmly in the child's behalf from the first, and seems to understand her position so thoroughly (a very rare merit in this world, I am sorry to say), that it would really be agreeable to me to notice her.'

Let it be no detraction from the merits of Miss Tox, to hint that in Mr Dombey's eyes, as in some others that occasionally see the light, they only achieved that mighty piece of knowledge, the understanding of their own position, who showed a fitting reverence for his. It was not so much their merit that they knew themselves, as that they knew him, and bowed low before him.

'My dear Paul,' returned his sister, 'you do Miss Tox but justice, as a man of your penetration was sure, I knew, to do. I believe if there are three words in the English language for which she has a respect amounting almost to veneration, those words are, Dombey and Son.'

'Well,' said Mr Dombey, 'I believe it. It does Miss Tox credit.'

'And as to anything in the shape of a token, my dear Paul,' pursued his sister, 'all I can say is that anything you give Miss Tox will be hoarded and prized,

I am sure, like a relic. But there is a way, my dear Paul, of showing your sense of Miss Tox's friendliness in a still more flattering and acceptable manner, if you should be so inclined.'

'How is that?' asked Mr Dombey.

'Godfathers, of course,' continued Mrs Chick, 'are important in point of connexion and influence.'

'I don't know why they should be, to my son, said Mr Dombey, coldly.

'Very true, my dear Paul,' retorted Mrs Chick, with an extraordinary show of animation, to cover the suddenness of her conversion; 'and spoken like yourself. I might have expected nothing else from you. I might have known that such would have been your opinion. Perhaps;' here Mrs Chick faltered again, as not quite comfortably feeling her way; 'perhaps that is a reason why you might have the less objection to allowing Miss Tox to be godmother to the dear thing, if it were only as deputy and proxy for someone else. That it would be received as a great honour and distinction, Paul, I need not say.

'Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, after a short pause, 'it is not to be supposed —'

'Certainly not,' cried Mrs Chick, hastening to anticipate a refusal, 'I never thought it was.'

Mr Dombey looked at her impatiently.

'Don't flurry me, my dear Paul,' said his sister; 'for that destroys me. I am far from strong. I have not been

quite myself, since poor dear Fanny departed.'

Mr Dombey glanced at the pocket-handkerchief which his sister applied to her eyes, and resumed: 'It is not to be supposed, I say 'And I say,' murmured Mrs Chick, 'that I never thought it was.'

'Good Heaven, Louisa!' said Mr Dombey.

'No, my dear Paul,' she remonstrated with tearful dignity, 'I must really be allowed to speak. I am not so clever, or so reasoning, or so eloquent, or so anything, as you are. I know that very well. So much the worse for me. But if they were the last words I had to utter — and last words should be very solemn to you and me, Paul, after poor dear Fanny — I would still say I never thought it was. And what is more,' added Mrs Chick with increased dignity, as if she had withheld her crushing argument until now, 'I never did think it was.' Mr Dombey walked to the window and back again.

'It is not to be supposed, Louisa,' he said (Mrs Chick had nailed her colours to the mast, and repeated 'I know it isn't,' but he took no notice of it), 'but that there are many persons who, supposing that I recognised any claim at all in such a case, have a claim upon me superior to Miss Tox's. But I do not. I recognise no such thing. Paul and myself will be able, when the time comes, to hold our own — the House, in other words, will be able to hold its own, and maintain its own, and hand down its own of itself, and without any such common-place aids. The kind of foreign help

which people usually seek for their children, I can afford to despise; being above it, I hope.

So that Paul's infancy and childhood pass away well, and I see him becoming qualified without waste of time for the career on which he is destined to enter, I am satisfied. He will make what powerful friends he pleases in after-life, when he is actively maintaining — and extending, if that is possible — the dignity and credit of the Firm.

Until then, I am enough for him, perhaps, and all in all. I have no wish that people should step in between us. I would much rather show my sense of the obliging conduct of a deserving person like your friend. Therefore let it be so; and your husband and myself will do well enough for the other sponsors, I daresay.'

In the course of these remarks, delivered with great majesty and grandeur, Mr Dombey had truly revealed the secret feelings of his breast. An indescribable distrust of anybody stepping in between himself and his son; a haughty dread of having any rival or partner in the boy's respect and deference; a sharp misgiving, recently acquired, that he was not infallible in his power of bending and binding human wills; as sharp a jealousy of any second check or cross; these were, at that time the master keys of his soul. In all his life, he had never made a friend. His cold and distant nature had neither sought one, nor found one. And now, when that nature concentrated its whole force

so strongly on a partial scheme of parental interest and ambition, it seemed as if its icy current, instead of being released by this influence, and running clear and free, had thawed for but an instant to admit its burden, and then frozen with it into one unyielding block.

Elevated thus to the godmotherhood of little Paul, in virtue of her insignificance, Miss Tox was from that hour chosen and appointed to office; and Mr Dombey further signified his pleasure that the ceremony, already long delayed, should take place without further postponement. His sister, who had been far from anticipating so signal a success, withdrew as soon as she could, to communicate it to her best of friends; and Mr Dombey was left alone in his library. He had already laid his hand upon the bellrope to convey his usual summons to Richards, when his eye fell upon a writing-desk, belonging to his deceased wife, which had been taken, among other things, from a cabinet in her chamber. It was not the first time that his eye had lighted on it. He carried the key in his pocket; and he brought it to his table and opened it now — having previously locked the room door — with a well-accustomed hand.

From beneath a leaf of torn and cancelled scraps of paper, he took one letter that remained entire. Involuntarily holding his breath as he opened this document, and 'bating in the stealthy action something of his arrogant demeanour, he sat down, resting his

head upon one hand, and read it through.

He read it slowly and attentively, and with a nice particularity to every syllable. Otherwise than as his great deliberation seemed unnatural, and perhaps the result of an effort equally great, he allowed no sign of emotion to escape him. When he had read it through, he folded and refolded it slowly several times, and tore it carefully into fragments. Checking his hand in the act of throwing these away, he put them in his pocket, as if unwilling to trust them even to the chances of being re-united and deciphered; and instead of ringing, as usual, for little Paul, he sat solitary, all the evening, in his cheerless room.

There was anything but solitude in the nursery; for there, Mrs Chick and Miss Tox were enjoying a social evening, so much to the disgust of Miss Susan Nipper, that that young lady embraced every opportunity of making wry faces behind the door. Her feelings were so much excited on the occasion, that she found it indispensable to afford them this relief, even without having the comfort of any audience or sympathy whatever. As the knight-errants of old relieved their minds by carving their mistress's names in deserts, and wildernesses, and other savage places where there was no probability of there ever being anybody to read them, so did Miss Susan Nipper curl her snub nose into drawers and wardrobes, put away winks of disparagement in cupboards, shed derisive

squints into stone pitchers, and contradict and call names out in the passage.

The two interlopers, however, blissfully unconscious of the young lady's sentiments, saw little Paul safe through all the stages of undressing, airy exercise, supper and bed; and then sat down to tea before the fire. The two children now lay, through the good offices of Polly, in one room; and it was not until the ladies were established at their tea-table that, happening to look towards the little beds, they thought of Florence.

'How sound she sleeps!' said Miss Tox.

'Why, you know, my dear, she takes a great deal of exercise in the course of the day,' returned Mrs Chick, 'playing about little Paul so much.'

'She is a curious child,' said Miss Tox.

'My dear,' retorted Mrs Chick, in a low voice: 'Her Mama, all over!'

'In deed!' said Miss Tox. 'Ah dear me!'

A tone of most extraordinary compassion Miss Tox said it in, though she had no distinct idea why, except that it was expected of her.

'Florence will never, never, never be a Dombey,' said Mrs Chick, 'not if she lives to be a thousand years old.'

Miss Tox elevated her eyebrows, and was again full of commiseration.

'I quite fret and worry myself about her,' said Mrs

Chick, with a sigh of modest merit. 'I really don't see what is to become of her when she grows older, or what position she is to take. She don't gain on her Papa in the least. How can one expect she should, when she is so very unlike a Dombey?'

Miss Tox looked as if she saw no way out of such a cogent argument as that, at all.

'And the child, you see,' said Mrs Chick, in deep confidence, 'has poor dear Fanny's nature. She'll never make an effort in after-life, I'll venture to say. Never! She'll never wind and twine herself about her Papa's heart like — '

'Like the ivy?' suggested Miss Tox.

'Like the ivy,' Mrs Chick assented. 'Never! She'll never glide and nestle into the bosom of her Papa's affections like — the — '

'Startled fawn?' suggested Miss Tox.

'Like the startled fawn,' said Mrs Chick. 'Never! Poor Fanny! Yet, how I loved her!'

'You must not distress yourself, my dear,' said Miss Tox, in a soothing voice. 'Now really! You have too much feeling.'

'We have all our faults,' said Mrs Chick, weeping and shaking her head. 'I daresay we have. I never was blind to hers. I never said I was. Far from it. Yet how I loved her!'

What a satisfaction it was to Mrs Chick — a common-place piece of folly enough, compared with

whom her sister-in-law had been a very angel of womanly intelligence and gentleness — to patronise and be tender to the memory of that lady: in exact pursuance of her conduct to her in her lifetime: and to thoroughly believe herself, and take herself in, and make herself uncommonly comfortable on the strength of her toleration! What a mighty pleasant virtue toleration should be when we are right, to be so very pleasant when we are wrong, and quite unable to demonstrate how we come to be invested with the privilege of exercising it!

Mrs Chick was yet drying her eyes and shaking her head, when Richards made bold to caution her that Miss Florence was awake and sitting in her bed. She had risen, as the nurse said, and the lashes of her eyes were wet with tears. But no one saw them glistening save Polly. No one else leant over her, and whispered soothing words to her, or was near enough to hear the flutter of her beating heart.

'Oh! dear nurse!' said the child, looking earnestly up in her face, 'let me lie by my brother!'

'Why, my pet?' said Richards.

'Oh! I think he loves me,' cried the child wildly. 'Let me lie by him. Pray do!'

Mrs Chick interposed with some motherly words about going to sleep like a dear, but Florence repeated her supplication, with a frightened look, and in a voice broken by sobs and tears.

'I'll not wake him,' she said, covering her face and hanging down her head. 'I'll only touch him with my hand, and go to sleep. Oh, pray, pray, let me lie by my brother to-night, for I believe he's fond of me!'

Richards took her without a word, and carrying her to the little bed in which the infant was sleeping, laid her down by his side. She crept as near him as she could without disturbing his rest; and stretching out one arm so that it timidly embraced his neck, and hiding her face on the other, over which her damp and scattered hair fell loose, lay motionless.

'Poor little thing,' said Miss Tox; 'she has been dreaming, I daresay.'

Dreaming, perhaps, of loving tones for ever silent, of loving eyes for ever closed, of loving arms again wound round her, and relaxing in that dream within the dam which no tongue can relate. Seeking, perhaps — in dreams — some natural comfort for a heart, deeply and sorely wounded, though so young a child's: and finding it, perhaps, in dreams, if not in waking, cold, substantial truth. This trivial incident had so interrupted the current of conversation, that it was difficult of resumption; and Mrs Chick moreover had been so affected by the contemplation of her own tolerant nature, that she was not in spirits. The two friends accordingly soon made an end of their tea, and a servant was despatched to fetch a hackney cabriolet for Miss Tox. Miss Tox had great experience in hackney

cabs, and her starting in one was generally a work of time, as she was systematic in the preparatory arrangements.

'Have the goodness, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'first of all, to carry out a pen and ink and take his number legibly.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'Then, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'have the goodness to turn the cushion. Which,' said Miss Tox apart to Mrs Chick, 'is generally damp, my dear.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'I'll trouble you also, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'with this card and this shilling. He's to drive to the card, and is to understand that he will not on any account have more than the shilling.'

'No, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'And — I'm sorry to give you so much trouble, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, looking at him pensively.

'Not at all, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'Mention to the man, then, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'that the lady's uncle is a magistrate, and that if he gives her any of his impertinence he will be punished terribly. You can pretend to say that, if you please, Towlinson, in a friendly way, and because you know it was done to another man, who died.'

'Certainly, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'And now good-night to my sweet, sweet, sweet, godson,' said Miss Tox, with a soft shower of kisses at each repetition of the adjective; 'and Louisa, my dear friend, promise me to take a little something warm before you go to bed, and not to distress yourself!'

It was with extreme difficulty that Nipper, the black-eyed, who looked on steadfastly, contained herself at this crisis, and until the subsequent departure of Mrs Chick. But the nursery being at length free of visitors, she made herself some recompense for her late restraint.

'You might keep me in a strait-waistcoat for six weeks,' said Nipper, 'and when I got it off I'd only be more aggravated, who ever heard the like of them two Griffins, Mrs Richards?'

'And then to talk of having been dreaming, poor dear!' said Polly.

'Oh you beauties!' cried Susan Nipper, affecting to salute the door by which the ladies had departed. 'Never be a Dombey won't she? It's to be hoped she won't, we don't want any more such, one's enough.'

'Don't wake the children, Susan dear,' said Polly.

'I'm very much beholden to you, Mrs Richards,' said Susan, who was not by any means discriminating in her wrath, 'and really feel it as a honour to receive your commands, being a black slave and a mulotter.

Mrs Richards, if there's any other orders, you can give me, pray mention 'em.'

'Nonsense; orders,' said Polly.

'Oh! bless your heart, Mrs Richards,' cried Susan, 'temporaries always orders permanencies here, didn't you know that, why wherever was you born, Mrs Richards? But wherever you was born, Mrs Richards,' pursued Spitfire, shaking her head resolutely, 'and whenever, and however (which is best known to yourself), you may bear in mind, please, that it's one thing to give orders, and quite another thing to take 'em. A person may tell a person to dive off a bridge head foremost into five-and-forty feet of water, Mrs Richards, but a person may be very far from diving.'

'There now,' said Polly, 'you're angry because you're a good little thing, and fond of Miss Florence; and yet you turn round on me, because there's nobody else.'

'It's very easy for some to keep their tempers, and be soft-spoken, Mrs Richards,' returned Susan, slightly mollified, 'when their child's made as much of as a prince, and is petted and patted till it wishes its friends further, but when a sweet young pretty innocent, that never ought to have a cross word spoken to or of it, is rundown, the case is very different indeed. My goodness gracious me, Miss Floy, you naughty, sinful child, if you don't shut your eyes this minute, I'll call in them hobgoblins that lives in the cock-loft to come and eat you up alive!'

Here Miss Nipper made a horrible lowing,

supposed to issue from a conscientious goblin of the bull species, impatient to discharge the severe duty of his position. Having further composed her young charge by covering her head with the bedclothes, and making three or four angry dabs at the pillow, she folded her arms, and screwed up her mouth, and sat looking at the fire for the rest of the evening.

Though little Paul was said, in nursery phrase, 'to take a deal of notice for his age,' he took as little notice of all this as of the preparations for his christening on the next day but one; which nevertheless went on about him, as to his personal apparel, and that of his sister and the two nurses, with great activity. Neither did he, on the arrival of the appointed morning, show any sense of its importance; being, on the contrary, unusually inclined to sleep, and unusually inclined to take it ill in his attendants that they dressed him to go out.

It happened to be an iron-grey autumnal day, with a shrewd east wind blowing — a day in keeping with the proceedings. Mr Dombey represented in himself the wind, the shade, and the autumn of the christening. He stood in his library to receive the company, as hard and cold as the weather; and when he looked out through the glass room, at the trees in the little garden, their brown and yellow leaves came fluttering down, as if he blighted them.

Ugh! They were black, cold rooms; and seemed to be in mourning, like the inmates of the house. The

books precisely matched as to size, and drawn up in line, like soldiers, looked in their cold, hard, slippery uniforms, as if they had but one idea among them, and that was a freezer. The bookcase, glazed and locked, repudiated all familiarities. Mr Pitt, in bronze, on the top, with no trace of his celestial origin' about him, guarded the unattainable treasure like an enchanted Moor. A dusty urn at each high corner, dug up from an ancient tomb, preached desolation and decay, as from two pulpits; and the chimney-glass, reflecting Mr Dombey and his portrait at one blow, seemed fraught with melancholy meditations.

The stiff and stark fire-irons appeared to claim a nearer relationship than anything else there to Mr Dombey, with his buttoned coat, his white cravat, his heavy gold watch-chain, and his creaking boots.

But this was before the arrival of Mr and Mrs Chick, his lawful relatives, who soon presented themselves.

'My dear Paul,' Mrs Chick murmured, as she embraced him, 'the beginning, I hope, of many joyful days!'

'Thank you, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, grimly. 'How do you do, Mr John?'

'How do you do, Sir?' said Chick.

He gave Mr Dombey his hand, as if he feared it might electrify him.

Mr Dombey took it as if it were a fish, or

seaweed, or some such clammy substance, and immediately returned it to him with exalted politeness.

'Perhaps, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, slightly turning his head in his cravat, as if it were a socket, 'you would have preferred a fire?'

'Oh, my dear Paul, no,' said Mrs Chick, who had much ado to keep her teeth from chattering; 'not for me.'

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, 'you are not sensible of any chill?'

Mr John, who had already got both his hands in his pockets over the wrists, and was on the very threshold of that same canine chorus which had given Mrs Chick so much offence on a former occasion, protested that he was perfectly comfortable.

He added in a low voice, 'With my tiddle tol toor rul' — when he was providentially stopped by Towlinson, who announced: 'Miss Tox!'

And enter that fair enslaver, with a blue nose and indescribably frosty face, referable to her being very thinly clad in a maze of fluttering odds and ends, to do honour to the ceremony.

'How do you do, Miss Tox?' said Mr Dombey.

Miss Tox, in the midst of her spreading gauzes, went down altogether like an opera-glass shutting-up; she curtsied so low, in acknowledgment of Mr Dombey's advancing a step or two to meet her.

'I can never forget this occasion, Sir,' said Miss

Tox, softly.

"Tis impossible. My dear Louisa, I can hardly believe the evidence of my senses.'

If Miss Tox could believe the evidence of one of her senses, it was a very cold day. That was quite clear. She took an early opportunity of promoting the circulation in the tip of her nose by secretly chafing it with her pocket handkerchief, lest, by its very low temperature, it should disagreeably astonish the baby when she came to kiss it.

The baby soon appeared, carried in great glory by Richards; while Florence, in custody of that active young constable, Susan Nipper, brought up the rear. Though the whole nursery party were dressed by this time in lighter mourning than at first, there was enough in the appearance of the bereaved children to make the day no brighter. The baby too — it might have been Miss Tox's nose — began to cry. Thereby, as it happened, preventing Mr Chick from the awkward fulfilment of a very honest purpose he had; which was, to make much of Florence. For this gentleman, insensible to the superior claims of a perfect Dombey (perhaps on account of having the honour to be united to a Dombey himself, and being familiar with excellence), really liked her, and showed that he liked her, and was about to show it in his own way now, when Paul cried, and his helpmate stopped him short 'Now Florence, child!' said her aunt, briskly, 'what are

you doing, love? Show yourself to him. Engage his attention, my dear!

The atmosphere became or might have become colder and colder, when Mr Dombey stood frigidly watching his little daughter, who, clapping her hands, and standing on tip-toe before the throne of his son and heir, lured him to bend down from his high estate, and look at her.

Some honest act of Richards's may have aided the effect, but he did look down, and held his peace. As his sister hid behind her nurse, he followed her with his eyes; and when she peeped out with a merry cry to him, he sprang up and crowed lustily — laughing outright when she ran in upon him; and seeming to fondle her curls with his tiny hands, while she smothered him with kisses.

Was Mr Dombey pleased to see this? He testified no pleasure by the relaxation of a nerve; but outward tokens of any kind of feeling were unusual with him. If any sunbeam stole into the room to light the children at their play, it never reached his face. He looked on so fixedly and coldly, that the warm light vanished even from the laughing eyes of little Florence, when, at last, they happened to meet his.

It was a dull, grey, autumn day indeed, and in a minute's pause and silence that took place, the leaves fell sorrowfully.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, referring to his

watch, and assuming his hat and gloves. 'Take my sister, if you please: my arm today is Miss Tox's. You had better go first with Master Paul, Richards. Be very careful.'

In Mr Dombey's carriage, Dombey and Son, Miss Tox, Mrs Chick, Richards, and Florence. In a little carriage following it, Susan Nipper and the owner Mr Chick. Susan looking out of window, without intermission, as a relief from the embarrassment of confronting the large face of that gentleman, and thinking whenever anything rattled that he was putting up in paper an appropriate pecuniary compliment for herself.

Once upon the road to church, Mr Dombey clapped his hands for the amusement of his son. At which instance of parental enthusiasm Miss Tox was enchanted. But exclusive of this incident, the chief difference between the christening party and a party in a mourning coach consisted in the colours of the carriage and horses.

Arrived at the church steps, they were received by a portentous beadle.' Mr Dombey dismounting first to help the ladies out, and standing near him at the church door, looked like another beadle. A beadle less gorgeous but more dreadful; the beadle of private life; the beadle of our business and our bosoms.

Miss Tox's hand trembled as she slipped it through Mr Dombey's arm, and felt herself escorted up

the steps, preceded by a cocked hat and a Babylonian collar. It seemed for a moment like that other solemn institution, 'Wilt thou have this man, Lucretia?' 'Yes, I will.'

'Please to bring the child in quick out of the air there,' whispered the beadle, holding open the inner door of the church.

Little Paul might have asked with Hamlet 'into my grave?' so chill and earthy was the place. The tall shrouded pulpit and reading desk; the dreary perspective of empty pews stretching away under the galleries, and empty benches mounting to the roof and lost in the shadow of the great grim organ; the dusty matting and cold stone slabs; the grisly free seats' in the aisles; and the damp corner by the bell-rope, where the black trestles used for funerals were stowed away, along with some shovels and baskets, and a coil or two of deadly-looking rope; the strange, unusual, uncomfortable smell, and the cadaverous light; were all in unison. It was a cold and dismal scene.

'There's a wedding just on, Sir,' said the beadle, 'but it'll be over directly, if you'll walk into the westry here.'

Before he turned again to lead the way, he gave Mr Dombey a bow and a half smile of recognition, importing that he (the beadle) remembered to have had the pleasure of attending on him when he buried his wife, and hoped he had enjoyed himself since.

The very wedding looked dismal as they passed in front of the altar. The bride was too old and the bridegroom too young, and a superannuated beau with one eye and an eyeglass stuck in its blank companion, was giving away the lady, while the friends were shivering.

In the vestry the fire was smoking; and an over-aged and over-worked and under-paid attorney's clerk, 'making a search,' was running his forefinger down the parchment pages of an immense register (one of a long series of similar volumes) gorged with burials. Over the fireplace was a ground-plan of the vaults underneath the church; and Mr Chick, skimming the literary portion of it aloud, by way of enlivening the company, read the reference to Mrs Dombey's tomb in full, before he could stop himself.

After another cold interval, a wheezy little pew-opener afflicted with an asthma, appropriate to the churchyard, if not to the church, summoned them to the font — a rigid marble basin which seemed to have been playing a churchyard game at cup and ball with its matter of fact pedestal, and to have been just that moment caught on the top of it.

Here they waited some little time while the marriage party enrolled themselves; and meanwhile the wheezy little pew-opener — partly in consequence of her infirmity, and partly that the marriage party might not forget her — went about the building coughing like

a grampus.

Presently the clerk (the only cheerful-looking object there, and he was an undertaker) came up with a jug of warm water, and said something, as he poured it into the font, about taking the chill off; which millions of gallons boiling hot could not have done for the occasion. Then the clergyman, an amiable and mild-looking young curate, but obviously afraid of the baby, appeared like the principal character in a ghost-story, 'a tall figure all in white;' at sight of whom Paul rent the air with his cries, and never left off again till he was taken out black in the face.

Even when that event had happened, to the great relief of everybody, he was heard under the portico, during the rest of the ceremony, now fainter, now louder, now hushed, now bursting forth again with an irrepressible sense of his wrongs. This so distracted the attention of the two ladies, that Mrs Chick was constantly deploying into the centre aisle, to send out messages by the pew-opener, while Miss Tox kept her Prayer-book open at the Gunpowder Plot, and occasionally read responses from that service.

During the whole of these proceedings, Mr Dombey remained as impassive and gentlemanly as ever, and perhaps assisted in making it so cold, that the young curate smoked at the mouth as he read. The only time that he unbent his visage in the least, was when the clergyman, in delivering (very unaffectedly and simply)

the closing exhortation, relative to the future examination of the child by the sponsors, happened to rest his eye on Mr Chick; and then Mr Dombey might have been seen to express by a majestic look, that he would like to catch him at it.

It might have been well for Mr Dombey, if he had thought of his own dignity a little less; and had thought of the great origin and purpose of the ceremony in which he took so formal and so stiff a part, a little more. His arrogance contrasted strangely with its history.

When it was all over, he again gave his arm to Miss Tox, and conducted her to the vestry, where he informed the clergyman how much pleasure it would have given him to have solicited the honour of his company at dinner, but for the unfortunate state of his household affairs. The register signed, and the fees paid, and the pew-opener (whose cough was very bad again) remembered, and the beadle gratified, and the sexton (who was accidentally on the doorsteps, looking with great interest at the weather) not forgotten, they got into the carriage again, and drove home in the same bleak fellowship.

There they found Mr Pitt turning up his nose at a cold collation, set forth in a cold pomp of glass and silver, and looking more like a dead dinner lying in state than a social refreshment. On their arrival Miss Tox produced a mug for her godson, and Mr Chick a

knife and fork and spoon in a case. Mr Dombey also produced a bracelet for Miss Tox; and, on the receipt of this token, Miss Tox was tenderly affected.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, 'will you take the bottom of the table, if you please? What have you got there, Mr John?'

'I have got a cold fillet of veal here, Sir,' replied Mr Chick, rubbing his numbed hands hard together. 'What have you got there, Sir?'

'This,' returned Mr Dombey, 'is some cold preparation of calf's head, I think. I see cold fowls — ham — patties — salad — lobster.

Miss Tox will do me the honour of taking some wine? Champagne to Miss Tox.'

There was a toothache in everything. The wine was so bitter cold that it forced a little scream from Miss Tox, which she had great difficulty in turning into a 'Hem!' The veal had come from such an airy pantry, that the first taste of it had struck a sensation as of cold lead to Mr Chick's extremities. Mr Dombey alone remained unmoved.

He might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman.

The prevailing influence was too much even for his sister. She made no effort at flattery or small talk, and directed all her efforts to looking as warm as she could.

'Well, Sir,' said Mr Chick, making a desperate

plunge, after a long silence, and filling a glass of sherry; 'I shall drink this, if you'll allow me, Sir, to little Paul.'

'Bless him!' murmured Miss Tox, taking a sip of wine.

'Dear little Dombey!' murmured Mrs Chick.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, with severe gravity, 'my son would feel and express himself obliged to you, I have no doubt, if he could appreciate the favour you have done him. He will prove, in time to come, I trust, equal to any responsibility that the obliging disposition of his relations and friends, in private, or the onerous nature of our position, in public, may impose upon him.'

The tone in which this was said admitting of nothing more, Mr Chick relapsed into low spirits and silence. Not so Miss Tox, who, having listened to Mr Dombey with even a more emphatic attention than usual, and with a more expressive tendency of her head to one side, now leant across the table, and said to Mrs Chick softly: 'Louisa!'

'My dear,' said Mrs Chick.

'Onerous nature of our position in public may — I have forgotten the exact term.'

'Expose him to,' said Mrs Chick.

'Pardon me, my dear,' returned Miss Tox, 'I think not. It was more rounded and flowing. Obliging disposition of relations and friends in private, or

onerous nature of position in public — may — impose upon him!

'Impose upon him, to be sure,' said Mrs Chick.

Miss Tox struck her delicate hands together lightly, in triumph; and added, casting up her eyes, 'eloquence indeed!'

Mr Dombey, in the meanwhile, had issued orders for the attendance of Richards, who now entered curtseying, but without the baby; Paul being asleep after the fatigues of the morning. Mr Dombey, having delivered a glass of wine to this vassal, addressed her in the following words: Miss Tox previously settling her head on one side, and making other little arrangements for engraving them on her heart.

'During the six months or so, Richards, which have seen you an inmate of this house, you have done your duty. Desiring to connect some little service to you with this occasion, I considered how I could best effect that object, and I also advised with my sister, Mrs —'

'Chick,' interposed the gentleman of that name.

'Oh, hush if you please!' said Miss Tox.

'I was about to say to you, Richards,' resumed Mr Dombey, with an appalling glance at Mr John, 'that I was further assisted in my decision, by the recollection of a conversation I held with your husband in this room, on the occasion of your being hired, when he disclosed to me the melancholy fact that your family,

himself at the head, were sunk and steeped in ignorance.

Richards quailed under the magnificence of the reproof.

'I am far from being friendly,' pursued Mr Dombey, 'to what is called by persons of levelling sentiments, general education. But it is necessary that the inferior classes should continue to be taught to know their position, and to conduct themselves properly. So far I approve of schools. Having the power of nominating a child on the foundation of an ancient establishment, called (from a worshipful company) the Charitable Grinders; where not only is a wholesome education bestowed upon the scholars, but where a dress and badge is likewise provided for them; I have (first communicating, through Mrs Chick, with your family) nominated your eldest son to an existing vacancy; and he has this day, I am informed, assumed the habit. The number of her son, I believe,' said Mr Dombey, turning to his sister and speaking of the child as if he were a hackney-coach, is one hundred and forty-seven. Louisa, you can tell her.'

'One hundred and forty-seven,' said Mrs Chick 'The dress, Richards, is a nice, warm, blue baize tailed coat and cap, turned up with orange coloured binding; red worsted stockings; and very strong leather small-clothes. One might wear the articles one's self,' said Mrs Chick, with enthusiasm, 'and be grateful.'

'There, Richards!' said Miss Tox. 'Now, indeed, you may be proud.

The Charitable Grinders!'

'I am sure I am very much obliged, Sir,' returned Richards faintly, 'and take it very kind that you should remember my little ones.' At the same time a vision of Biler as a Charitable Grinder, with his very small legs encased in the serviceable clothing described by Mrs Chick, swam before Richards's eyes, and made them water.

'I am very glad to see you have so much feeling, Richards,' said Miss Tox.

'It makes one almost hope, it really does,' said Mrs Chick, who prided herself on taking trustful views of human nature, 'that there may yet be some faint spark of gratitude and right feeling in the world.'

Richards deferred to these compliments by curtsying and murmuring her thanks; but finding it quite impossible to recover her spirits from the disorder into which they had been thrown by the image of her son in his precocious nether garments, she gradually approached the door and was heartily relieved to escape by it.

Such temporary indications of a partial thaw that had appeared with her, vanished with her; and the frost set in again, as cold and hard as ever. Mr Chick was twice heard to hum a tune at the bottom of the table, but on both occasions it was a fragment of the Dead March

in Saul. The party seemed to get colder and colder, and to be gradually resolving itself into a congealed and solid state, like the collation round which it was assembled. At length Mrs Chick looked at Miss Tox, and Miss Tox returned the look, and they both rose and said it was really time to go. Mr Dombey receiving this announcement with perfect equanimity, they took leave of that gentleman, and presently departed under the protection of Mr Chick; who, when they had turned their backs upon the house and left its master in his usual solitary state, put his hands in his pockets, threw himself back in the carriage, and whistled 'With a hey ho chevy!' all through; conveying into his face as he did so, an expression of such gloomy and terrible defiance, that Mrs Chick dared not protest, or in any way molest him.

Richards, though she had little Paul on her lap, could not forget her own first-born. She felt it was ungrateful; but the influence of the day fell even on the Charitable Grinders, and she could hardly help regarding his pewter badge, number one hundred and forty-seven, as, somehow, a part of its formality and sternness. She spoke, too, in the nursery, of his 'blessed legs,' and was again troubled by his spectre in uniform.

'I don't know what I wouldn't give,' said Polly, 'to see the poor little dear before he gets used to 'em.'

'Why, then, I tell you what, Mrs Richards,' retorted Nipper, who had been admitted to her

confidence, 'see him and make your mind easy.'

'Mr Dombey wouldn't like it,' said Polly.

'Oh, wouldn't he, Mrs Richards!' retorted Nipper, 'he'd like it very much, I think when he was asked.'

'You wouldn't ask him, I suppose, at all?' said Polly.

'No, Mrs Richards, quite contrary,' returned Susan, 'and them two inspectors Tox and Chick, not intending to be on duty tomorrow, as I heard 'em say, me and Mid Floy will go along with you tomorrow morning, and welcome, Mrs Richards, if you like, for we may as well walk there as up and down a street, and better too.'

Polly rejected the idea pretty stoutly at first; but by little and little she began to entertain it, as she entertained more and more distinctly the forbidden pictures of her children, and her own home.

At length, arguing that there could be no great harm in calling for a moment at the door, she yielded to the Nipper proposition.

The matter being settled thus, little Paul began to cry most piteously, as if he had a foreboding that no good would come of it.

'What's the matter with the child?' asked Susan.

'He's cold, I think,' said Polly, walking with him to and fro, and hushing him.

It was a bleak autumnal afternoon indeed; and as she walked, and hushed, and, glancing through the

dreary windows, pressed the little fellow closer to her breast, the withered leaves came showering down.

CHAPTER 6

Paul's Second Deprivation

Polly was beset by so many misgivings in the morning, that but for the incessant promptings of her black-eyed companion, she would have abandoned all thoughts of the expedition, and formally petitioned for leave to see number one hundred and forty-seven, under the awful shadow of Mr Dombey's roof. But Susan who was personally disposed in favour of the excursion, and who (like Tony Lumpkin), if she could bear the disappointments of other people with tolerable fortitude, could not abide to disappoint herself, threw so many ingenious doubts in the way of this second thought, and stimulated the original intention with so many ingenious arguments, that almost as soon as Mr Dombey's stately back was turned, and that gentleman was pursuing his daily road towards the City, his unconscious son was on his way to Staggs's Gardens.

This euphonious locality was situated in a suburb, known by the inhabitants of Staggs's Gardens by the name of Camberling Town; a designation which the Strangers' Map of London, as printed (with a view to pleasant and commodious reference) on pocket handkerchiefs, condenses, with some show of reason,

into Camden Town. Hither the two nurses bent their steps, accompanied by their charges; Richards carrying Paul, of course, and Susan leading little Florence by the hand, and giving her such jerks and pokes from time to time, as she considered it wholesome to administer.

The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood. Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond.

Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcasses of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air,

mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.

But as yet, the neighbourhood was shy to own the Railroad. One or two bold speculators had projected streets; and one had built a little, but had stopped among the mud and ashes to consider farther of it. A bran-new Tavern, redolent of fresh mortar and size, and fronting nothing at all, had taken for its sign The Railway Arms; but that might be rash enterprise — and then it hoped to sell drink to the workmen. So, the Excavators' House of Call had sprung up from a beer-shop; and the old-established Ham and Beef Shop had become the Railway Eating House, with a roast leg of pork daily, through interested motives of a similar immediate and popular description.

Lodging-house keepers were favourable in like manner; and for the like reasons were not to be trusted. The general belief was very slow.

There were frowzy fields, and cow-houses, and dunghills, and dustheaps, and ditches, and gardens, and summer-houses, and carpet-beating grounds, at the very door of the Railway. Little tumuli of oyster shells in the oyster season, and of lobster shells in the lobster season, and of broken crockery and faded cabbage leaves in all seasons, encroached upon its high places. Posts, and rails, and old cautions to trespassers, and backs of mean houses, and patches of wretched vegetation, stared it out of countenance. Nothing was the better for it, or thought of being so. If the miserable waste ground lying near it could have laughed, it would have laughed it to scorn, like many of the miserable neighbours.

Staggs's Gardens was uncommonly incredulous. It was a little row of houses, with little squalid patches of ground before them, fenced off with old doors, barrel staves, scraps of tarpaulin, and dead bushes; with bottomless tin kettles and exhausted iron fenders, thrust into the gaps. Here, the Staggs's Gardeners trained scarlet beans, kept fowls and rabbits, erected rotten summer-houses (one was an old boat), dried clothes, and smoked pipes. Some were of opinion that Staggs's Gardens derived its name from a deceased capitalist, one Mr Staggs, who had built it for his delectation. Others, who had a natural taste for the country, held that it dated from those rural times when the antlered herd, under the familiar denomination of Staggses, had

resorted to its shady precincts. Be this as it may, Staggs's Gardens was regarded by its population as a sacred grove not to be withered by Railroads; and so confident were they generally of its long outliving any such ridiculous inventions, that the master chimney-sweeper at the corner, who was understood to take the lead in the local politics of the Gardens, had publicly declared that on the occasion of the Railroad opening, if ever it did open, two of his boys should ascend the flues of his dwelling, with instructions to hail the failure with derisive cheers from the chimney-pots.

To this unhallowed spot, the very name of which had hitherto been carefully concealed from Mr Dombey by his sister, was little Paul now borne by Fate and Richards 'That's my house, Susan,' said Polly, pointing it out.

'Is it, indeed, Mrs Richards?' said Susan, condescendingly.

'And there's my sister Jemima at the door, I do declare' cried Polly, 'with my own sweet precious baby in her arms!'

The sight added such an extensive pair of wings to Polly's impatience, that she set off down the Gardens at a run, and bouncing on Jemima, changed babies with her in a twinkling; to the unutterable astonishment of that young damsel, on whom the heir of the Dombey's seemed to have fallen from the clouds.

'Why, Polly!' cried Jemima. 'You! what a turn you have given me! who'd have thought it! come along in Polly! How well you do look to be sure! The children will go half wild to see you Polly, that they will.'

That they did, if one might judge from the noise they made, and the way in which they dashed at Polly and dragged her to a low chair in the chimney corner, where her own honest apple face became immediately the centre of a bunch of smaller pippins, all laying their rosy cheeks close to it, and all evidently the growth of the same tree. As to Polly, she was full as noisy and vehement as the children; and it was not until she was quite out of breath, and her hair was hanging all about her flushed face, and her new christening attire was very much dishevelled, that any pause took place in the confusion. Even then, the smallest Toodle but one remained in her lap, holding on tight with both arms round her neck; while the smallest Toodle but two mounted on the back of the chair, and made desperate efforts, with one leg in the air, to kiss her round the corner.

'Look! there's a pretty little lady come to see you,' said Polly; 'and see how quiet she is! what a beautiful little lady, ain't she?'

This reference to Florence, who had been standing by the door not unobservant of what passed, directed the attention of the younger branches towards

her; and had likewise the happy effect of leading to the formal recognition of Miss Nipper, who was not quite free from a misgiving that she had been already slighted.

'Oh do come in and sit down a minute, Susan, please,' said Polly.

'This is my sister Jemima, this is. Jemima, I don't know what I should ever do with myself, if it wasn't for Susan Nipper; I shouldn't be here now but for her.'

'Oh do sit down, Miss Nipper, if you please,' quoth Jemima.

Susan took the extreme corner of a chair, with a stately and ceremonious aspect.

'I never was so glad to see anybody in all my life; now really I never was, Miss Nipper,' said Jemima.

Susan relaxing, took a little more of the chair, and smiled graciously.

'Do untie your bonnet-strings, and make yourself at home, Miss Nipper, please,' entreated Jemima. 'I am afraid it's a poorer place than you're used to; but you'll make allowances, I'm sure.'

The black-eyed was so softened by this deferential behaviour, that she caught up little Miss Toodle who was running past, and took her to Banbury Cross immediately.

'But where's my pretty boy?' said Polly. 'My poor fellow? I came all this way to see him in his new clothes.'

'Ah what a pity!' cried Jemima. 'He'll break his heart, when he hears his mother has been here. He's at school, Polly.'

'Gone already!'

'Yes. He went for the first time yesterday, for fear he should lose any learning. But it's half-holiday, Polly: if you could only stop till he comes home — you and Miss Nipper, leastways,' said Jemima, mindful in good time of the dignity of the black-eyed.

'And how does he look, Jemima, bless him!' faltered Polly.

'Well, really he don't look so bad as you'd suppose,' returned Jemima.

'Ah!' said Polly, with emotion, 'I knew his legs must be too short.'

'His legs is short,' returned Jemima; 'especially behind; but they'll get longer, Polly, every day.'

It was a slow, prospective kind of consolation; but the cheerfulness and good nature with which it was administered, gave it a value it did not intrinsically possess. After a moment's silence, Polly asked, in a more sprightly manner: 'And where's Father, Jemima dear?' — for by that patriarchal appellation, Mr Toodle was generally known in the family.

'There again!' said Jemima. 'What a pity! Father took his dinner with him this morning, and isn't coming home till night. But he's always talking of you, Polly, and telling the children about you; and is the

peaceablest, patientest, best-temperedest soul in the world, as he always was and will be!

'Thankee, Jemima,' cried the simple Polly; delighted by the speech, and disappointed by the absence.

'Oh you needn't thank me, Polly,' said her sister, giving her a sounding kiss upon the cheek, and then dancing little Paul cheerfully.

'I say the same of you sometimes, and think it too.'

In spite of the double disappointment, it was impossible to regard in the light of a failure a visit which was greeted with such a reception; so the sisters talked hopefully about family matters, and about Biler, and about all his brothers and sisters: while the black-eyed, having performed several journeys to Banbury Cross and back, took sharp note of the furniture, the Dutch clock, the cupboard, the castle on the mantel-piece with red and green windows in it, susceptible of illumination by a candle-end within; and the pair of small black velvet kittens, each with a lady's reticule in its mouth; regarded by the Staggs's Gardeners as prodigies of imitative art. The conversation soon becoming general lest the black-eyed should go off at score and turn sarcastic, that young lady related to Jemima a summary of everything she knew concerning Mr Dombey, his prospects, family, pursuits, and character. Also an exact inventory of her

personal wardrobe, and some account of her principal relations and friends. Having relieved her mind of these disclosures, she partook of shrimps and porter, and evinced a disposition to swear eternal friendship.

Little Florence herself was not behind-hand in improving the occasion; for, being conducted forth by the young Toodles to inspect some toad-stools and other curiosities of the Gardens, she entered with them, heart and soul, on the formation of a temporary breakwater across a small green pool that had collected in a corner. She was still busily engaged in that labour, when sought and found by Susan; who, such was her sense of duty, even under the humanizing influence of shrimps, delivered a moral address to her (punctuated with thumps) on her degenerate nature, while washing her face and hands; and predicted that she would bring the grey hairs of her family in general, with sorrow to the grave. After some delay, occasioned by a pretty long confidential interview above stairs on pecuniary subjects, between Polly and Jemima, an interchange of babies was again effected — for Polly had all this time retained her own child, and Jemima little Paul — and the visitors took leave.

But first the young Toodles, victims of a pious fraud, were deluded into repairing in a body to a chandler's shop in the neighbourhood, for the ostensible purpose of spending a penny; and when the coast was quite clear, Polly fled: Jemima calling after her that if

they could only go round towards the City Road on their way back, they would be sure to meet little Biler coming from school.

'Do you think that we might make time to go a little round in that direction, Susan?' inquired Polly, when they halted to take breath.

'Why not, Mrs Richards?' returned Susan.

'It's getting on towards our dinner time you know,' said Polly.

But lunch had rendered her companion more than indifferent to this grave consideration, so she allowed no weight to it, and they resolved to go 'a little round.'

Now, it happened that poor Biler's life had been, since yesterday morning, rendered weary by the costume of the Charitable Grinders. The youth of the streets could not endure it. No young vagabond could be brought to bear its contemplation for a moment, without throwing himself upon the unoffending wearer, and doing him a mischief. His social existence had been more like that of an early Christian, than an innocent child of the nineteenth century. He had been stoned in the streets. He had been overthrown into gutters; bespattered with mud; violently flattened against posts. Entire strangers to his person had lifted his yellow cap off his head, and cast it to the winds. His legs had not only undergone verbal criticisms and revilings, but had been handled and pinched. That very morning, he had received a perfectly unsolicited black eye on his way to

the Grinders' establishment, and had been punished for it by the master: a superannuated old Grinder of savage disposition, who had been appointed schoolmaster because he didn't know anything, and wasn't fit for anything, and for whose cruel cane all chubby little boys had a perfect fascination.'

Thus it fell out that Biler, on his way home, sought unfrequented paths; and slunk along by narrow passages and back streets, to avoid his tormentors. Being compelled to emerge into the main road, his ill fortune brought him at last where a small party of boys, headed by a ferocious young butcher, were lying in wait for any means of pleasurable excitement that might happen. These, finding a Charitable Grinder in the midst of them — unaccountably delivered over, as it were, into their hands — set up a general yell and rushed upon him.

But it so fell out likewise, that, at the same time, Polly, looking hopelessly along the road before her, after a good hour's walk, had said it was no use going any further, when suddenly she saw this sight. She no sooner saw it than, uttering a hasty exclamation, and giving Master Dombey to the black-eyed, she started to the rescue of her unhappy little son.

Surprises, like misfortunes, rarely come alone. The astonished Susan Nipper and her two young charges were rescued by the bystanders from under the very wheels of a passing carriage before they knew

what had happened; and at that moment (it was market day) a thundering alarm of 'Mad Bull!' was raised.

With a wild confusion before her, of people running up and down, and shouting, and wheels running over them, and boys fighting, and mad bulls coming up, and the nurse in the midst of all these dangers being torn to pieces, Florence screamed and ran. She ran till she was exhausted, urging Susan to do the same; and then, stopping and wringing her hands as she remembered they had left the other nurse behind, found, with a sensation of terror not to be described, that she was quite alone.

'Susan! Susan!' cried Florence, clapping her hands in the very ecstasy of her alarm. 'Oh, where are they? where are they?'

'Where are they?' said an old woman, coming hobbling across as fast as she could from the opposite side of the way. 'Why did you run away from 'em?'

'I was frightened,' answered Florence. 'I didn't know what I did. I thought they were with me. Where are they?'

The old woman took her by the wrist, and said, 'I'll show you.'

She was a very ugly old woman, with red rims round her eyes, and a mouth that mumbled and chattered of itself when she was not speaking.

She was miserably dressed, and carried some skins over her arm. She seemed to have followed

Florence some little way at all events, for she had lost her breath; and this made her uglier still, as she stood trying to regain it: working her shrivelled yellow face and throat into all sorts of contortions.

Florence was afraid of her, and looked, hesitating, up the street, of which she had almost reached the bottom. It was a solitary place — more a back road than a street — and there was no one in it but herself and the old woman.

'You needn't be frightened now,' said the old woman, still holding her tight. 'Come along with me.'

'I—I don't know you. What's your name?' asked Florence.

'Mrs Brown,' said the old woman. 'Good Mrs Brown.'

'Are they near here?' asked Florence, beginning to be led away.

'Susan ain't far off,' said Good Mrs Brown; 'and the others are close to her.'

'Is anybody hurt?' cried Florence.

'Not a bit of it,' said Good Mrs Brown.

The child shed tears of delight on hearing this, and accompanied the old woman willingly; though she could not help glancing at her face as they went along — particularly at that industrious mouth — and wondering whether Bad Mrs Brown, if there were such a person, was at all like her.

They had not gone far, but had gone by some

very uncomfortable places, such as brick-fields and tile-yards, when the old woman turned down a dirty lane, where the mud lay in deep black ruts in the middle of the road. She stopped before a shabby little house, as closely shut up as a house that was full of cracks and crevices could be. Opening the door with a key she took out of her bonnet, she pushed the child before her into a back room, where there was a great heap of rags of different colours lying on the floor; a heap of bones, and a heap of sifted dust or cinders; but there was no furniture at all, and the walls and ceiling were quite black.

The child became so terrified she was stricken speechless, and looked as though about to swoon.

'Now don't be a young mule,' said Good Mrs Brown, reviving her with a shake. 'I'm not a going to hurt you. Sit upon the rags.'

Florence obeyed her, holding out her folded hands, in mute supplication.

'I'm not a going to keep you, even, above an hour,' said Mrs Brown.

'D'ye understand what I say?'

The child answered with great difficulty, 'Yes.'

'Then,' said Good Mrs Brown, taking her own seat on the bones, 'don't vex me. If you don't, I tell you I won't hurt you. But if you do, I'll kill you. I could have you killed at any time — even if you was in your own bed at home. Now let's know who you are, and

what you are, and all about it.'

The old woman's threats and promises; the dread of giving her offence; and the habit, unusual to a child, but almost natural to Florence now, of being quiet, and repressing what she felt, and feared, and hoped; enabled her to do this bidding, and to tell her little history, or what she knew of it. Mrs Brown listened attentively, until she had finished.

'So your name's Dombey, eh?' said Mrs Brown.

'I want that pretty frock, Miss Dombey,' said Good Mrs Brown, 'and that little bonnet, and a petticoat or two, and anything else you can spare. Come! Take 'em off.'

Florence obeyed, as fast as her trembling hands would allow; keeping, all the while, a frightened eye on Mrs Brown. When she had divested herself of all the articles of apparel mentioned by that lady, Mrs B. examined them at leisure, and seemed tolerably well satisfied with their quality and value.

'Humph!' she said, running her eyes over the child's slight figure, 'I don't see anything else — except the shoes. I must have the shoes, Miss Dombey.'

Poor little Florence took them off with equal alacrity, only too glad to have any more means of conciliation about her. The old woman then produced some wretched substitutes from the bottom of the heap of rags, which she turned up for that purpose; together with a girl's cloak, quite worn out and very old; and the

crushed remains of a bonnet that had probably been picked up from some ditch or dunghill.

In this dainty raiment, she instructed Florence to dress herself; and as such preparation seemed a prelude to her release, the child complied with increased readiness, if possible.

In hurriedly putting on the bonnet, if that may be called a bonnet which was more like a pad to carry loads on, she caught it in her hair which grew luxuriantly, and could not immediately disentangle it. Good Mrs Brown whipped out a large pair of scissors, and fell into an unaccountable state of excitement.

'Why couldn't you let me be!' said Mrs Brown, 'when I was contented? You little fool!'

'I beg your pardon. I don't know what I have done,' panted Florence. 'I couldn't help it.'

'Couldn't help it!' cried Mrs Brown. 'How do you expect I can help it? Why, Lord!' said the old woman, ruffling her curls with a furious pleasure, 'anybody but me would have had 'em off, first of all.'

Florence was so relieved to find that it was only her hair and not her head which Mrs Brown coveted, that she offered no resistance or entreaty, and merely raised her mild eyes towards the face of that good soul.

'If I hadn't once had a gal of my own — beyond seas now — that was proud of her hair,' said Mrs Brown, 'I'd have had every lock of it.'

She's far away, she's far away! Oho! Oho!'

Mrs Brown's was not a melodious cry, but, accompanied with a wild tossing up of her lean arms, it was full of passionate grief, and thrilled to the heart of Florence, whom it frightened more than ever.

It had its part, perhaps, in saving her curls; for Mrs Brown, after hovering about her with the scissors for some moments, like a new kind of butterfly, bade her hide them under the bonnet and let no trace of them escape to tempt her. Having accomplished this victory over herself, Mrs Brown resumed her seat on the bones, and smoked a very short black pipe, mowing and mumbling all the time, as if she were eating the stem.

When the pipe was smoked out, she gave the child a rabbit-skin to carry, that she might appear the more like her ordinary companion, and told her that she was now going to lead her to a public street whence she could inquire her way to her friends. But she cautioned her, with threats of summary and deadly vengeance in case of disobedience, not to talk to strangers, nor to repair to her own home (which may have been too near for Mrs Brown's convenience), but to her father's office in the City; also to wait at the street corner where she would be left, until the clock struck three. These directions Mrs Brown enforced with assurances that there would be potent eyes and ears in her employment cognizant of all she did; and these directions Florence promised faithfully and earnestly to observe.

At length, Mrs Brown, issuing forth, conducted

her changed and ragged little friend through a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and alleys, which emerged, after a long time, upon a stable yard, with a gateway at the end, whence the roar of a great thoroughfare made itself audible. Pointing out this gateway, and informing Florence that when the clocks struck three she was to go to the left, Mrs Brown, after making a parting grasp at her hair which seemed involuntary and quite beyond her own control, told her she knew what to do, and bade her go and do it: remembering that she was watched.

With a lighter heart, but still sore afraid, Florence felt herself released, and tripped off to the corner. When she reached it, she looked back and saw the head of Good Mrs Brown peeping out of the low wooden passage, where she had issued her parting injunctions; likewise the fist of Good Mrs Brown shaking towards her. But though she often looked back afterwards — every minute, at least, in her nervous recollection of the old woman — she could not see her again.

Florence remained there, looking at the bustle in the street, and more and more bewildered by it; and in the meanwhile the clocks appeared to have made up their minds never to strike three any more.

At last the steeples rang out three o'clock; there was one close by, so she couldn't be mistaken; and — after often looking over her shoulder, and often going a little way, and as often coming back again, lest the

all-powerful spies of Mrs Brown should take offence — she hurried off, as fast as she could in her slipshod shoes, holding the rabbit-skin tight in her hand.

All she knew of her father's offices was that they belonged to Dombey and Son, and that that was a great power belonging to the City.

So she could only ask the way to Dombey and Son's in the City; and as she generally made inquiry of children — being afraid to ask grown people — she got very little satisfaction indeed. But by dint of asking her way to the City after a while, and dropping the rest of her inquiry for the present, she really did advance, by slow degrees, towards the heart of that great region which is governed by the terrible Lord Mayor.

Tired of walking, repulsed and pushed about, stunned by the noise and confusion, anxious for her brother and the nurses, terrified by what she had undergone, and the prospect of encountering her angry father in such an altered state; perplexed and frightened alike by what had passed, and what was passing, and what was yet before her;

Florence went upon her weary way with tearful eyes, and once or twice could not help stopping to ease her bursting heart by crying bitterly.

But few people noticed her at those times, in the garb she wore: or if they did, believed that she was tutored to excite compassion, and passed on. Florence, too, called to her aid all the firmness and self-reliance

of a character that her sad experience had prematurely formed and tried: and keeping the end she had in view steadily before her, steadily pursued it.

It was full two hours later in the afternoon than when she had started on this strange adventure, when, escaping from the clash and clangour of a narrow street full of carts and waggons, she peeped into a kind of wharf or landing-place upon the river-side, where there were a great many packages, casks, and boxes, strewn about; a large pair of wooden scales; and a little wooden house on wheels, outside of which, looking at the neighbouring masts and boats, a stout man stood whistling, with his pen behind his ear, and his hands in his pockets, as if his day's work were nearly done.

'Now then! 'said this man, happening to turn round. 'We haven't got anything for you, little girl. Be off!'

'If you please, is this the City?' asked the trembling daughter of the Dombey's.

'Ah! It's the City. You know that well enough, I daresay. Be off!'

'We haven't got anything for you.'

'I don't want anything, thank you,' was the timid answer. 'Except to know the way to Dombey and Son's.'

The man who had been strolling carelessly towards her, seemed surprised by this reply, and looking attentively in her face, rejoined: 'Why, what can you want with Dombey and Son's?'

'To know the way there, if you please.'

The man looked at her yet more curiously, and rubbed the back of his head so hard in his wonderment that he knocked his own hat off.

'Joe!' he called to another man — a labourer— as he picked it up and put it on again.

'Joe it is!' said Joe.

'Where's that young spark of Dombey's who's been watching the shipment of them goods?'

'Just gone, by t'other gate,' said Joe.

'Call him back a minute.'

Joe ran up an archway, bawling as he went, and very soon returned with a blithe-looking boy.

'You're Dombey's jockey, ain't you?' said the first man.

'I'm in Dombey's House, Mr Clark,' returned the boy.

'Look'ye here, then,' said Mr Clark.

Obedient to the indication of Mr Clark's hand, the boy approached towards Florence, wondering, as well he might, what he had to do with her. But she, who had heard what passed, and who, besides the relief of so suddenly considering herself safe at her journey's end, felt reassured beyond all measure by his lively youthful face and manner, ran eagerly up to him, leaving one of the slipshod shoes upon the ground and caught his hand in both of hers.

'I am lost, if you please!' said Florence.

'Lost!' cried the boy.

'Yes, I was lost this morning, a long way from here — and I have had my clothes taken away, since — and I am not dressed in my own now — and my name is Florence Dombey, my little brother's only sister — and, oh dear, dear, take care of me, if you please!' sobbed Florence, giving full vent to the childish feelings she had so long suppressed, and bursting into tears. At the same time her miserable bonnet falling off, her hair came tumbling down about her face: moving to speechless admiration and commiseration, young Walter, nephew of Solomon Gills, Ships' Instrument-maker in general.

Mr Clark stood rapt in amazement: observing under his breath, I never saw such a start on this wharf before. Walter picked up the shoe, and put it on the little foot as the Prince in the story might have fitted Cinderella's slipper on. He hung the rabbit-skin over his left arm; gave the right to Florence; and felt, not to say like Richard Whittington — that is a tame comparison — but like Saint George of England, with the dragon lying dead before him.

'Don't cry, Miss Dombey,' said Walter, in a transport of enthusiasm.

'What a wonderful thing for me that I am here! You are as safe now as if you were guarded by a whole boat's crew of picked men from a man-of-war. Oh, don't cry.'

'I won't cry any more,' said Florence. 'I am only crying for joy.'

'Crying for joy!' thought Walter, 'and I'm the cause of it! Come along, Miss Dombey. There's the other shoe off now! Take mine, Miss Dombey.'

'No, no, no,' said Florence, checking him in the act of impetuously pulling off his own. 'These do better. These do very well.'

'Why, to be sure,' said Walter, glancing at her foot, 'mine are a mile too large. What am I thinking about! You never could walk in mine! Come along, Miss Dombey. Let me see the villain who will dare molest you now.'

So Walter, looking immensely fierce, led off Florence, looking very happy; and they went arm-in-arm along the streets, perfectly indifferent to any astonishment that their appearance might or did excite by the way.

It was growing dark and foggy, and beginning to rain too; but they cared nothing for this: being both wholly absorbed in the late adventures of Florence, which she related with the innocent good faith and confidence of her years, while Walter listened as if, far from the mud and grease of Thames Street, they were rambling alone among the broad leaves and tall trees of some desert island in the tropics — as he very likely fancied, for the time, they were.

'Have we far to go?' asked Florence at last, lilting

up her eyes to her companion's face.

'Ah! By-the-bye,' said Walter, stopping, 'let me see; where are we?'

Oh! I know. But the offices are shut up now, Miss Dombey. There's nobody there. Mr Dombey has gone home long ago. I suppose we must go home too? or, stay. Suppose I take you to my Uncle's, where I live — it's very near here — and go to your house in a coach to tell them you are safe, and bring you back some clothes. Won't that be best?'

'I think so,' answered Florence. 'Don't you? What do you think?'

As they stood deliberating in the street, a man passed them, who glanced quickly at Walter as he went by, as if he recognised him; but seeming to correct that first impression, he passed on without stopping.

'Why, I think it's Mr Carker,' said Walter. 'Carker in our House.

Not Carker our Manager, Miss Dombey — the other Carker; the Junior — Halloa! Mr Carker!'

'Is that Walter Gay?' said the other, stopping and returning. 'I couldn't believe it, with such a strange companion.

As he stood near a lamp, listening with surprise to Walter's hurried explanation, he presented a remarkable contrast to the two youthful figures arm-in-arm before him. He was not old, but his hair was white; his body was bent, or bowed as if by the weight of some great

trouble: and there were deep lines in his worn and melancholy face. The fire of his eyes, the expression of his features, the very voice in which he spoke, were all subdued and quenched, as if the spirit within him lay in ashes. He was respectably, though very plainly dressed, in black; but his clothes, moulded to the general character of his figure, seemed to shrink and abase themselves upon him, and to join in the sorrowful solicitation which the whole man from head to foot expressed, to be left unnoticed, and alone in his humility.

And yet his interest in youth and hopefulness was not extinguished with the other embers of his soul, for he watched the boy's earnest countenance as he spoke with unusual sympathy, though with an inexplicable show of trouble and compassion, which escaped into his looks, however hard he strove to hold it prisoner. When Walter, in conclusion, put to him the question he had put to Florence, he still stood glancing at him with the same expression, as if he had read some fate upon his face, mournfully at variance with its present brightness.

'What do you advise, Mr Carker?' said Walter, smiling. 'You always give me good advice, you know, when you do speak to me. That's not often, though.'

'I think your own idea is the best,' he answered: looking from Florence to Walter, and back again.

'Mr Carker,' said Walter, brightening with a

generous thought, 'Come! Here's a chance for you. Go you to Mr Dombey's, and be the messenger of good news. It may do you some good, Sir. I'll remain at home. You shall go.'

'I!' returned the other.

'Yes. Why not, Mr Carker?' said the boy.

He merely shook him by the hand in answer; he seemed in a manner ashamed and afraid even to do that; and bidding him good-night, and advising him to make haste, turned away.

'Come, Miss Dombey,' said Walter, looking after him as they turned away also, 'we'll go to my Uncle's as quick as we can. Did you ever hear Mr Dombey speak of Mr Carker the Junior, Miss Florence?'

'No,' returned the child, mildly, 'I don't often hear Papa speak.'

'Ah! true! more shame for him,' thought Walter. After a minute's pause, during which he had been looking down upon the gentle patient little face moving on at his side, he said, 'The strangest man, Mr Carker the Junior is, Miss Florence, that ever you heard of. If you could understand what an extraordinary interest he takes in me, and yet how he shuns me and avoids me; and what a low place he holds in our office, and how he is never advanced, and never complains, though year after year he sees young men passed over his head, and though his brother (younger than he is), is our head Manager, you would be as much puzzled about him as I

am.'

As Florence could hardly be expected to understand much about it, Walter bestirred himself with his accustomed boyish animation and restlessness to change the subject; and one of the unfortunate shoes coming off again opportunely, proposed to carry Florence to his uncle's in his arms. Florence, though very tired, laughingly declined the proposal, lest he should let her fall; and as they were already near the wooden *Midshipman*, and as Walter went on to cite various precedents, from shipwrecks and other moving accidents, where younger boys than he had triumphantly rescued and carried off older girls than Florence, they were still in full conversation about it when they arrived at the Instrument-maker's door.

'Holloa, Uncle Sol!' cried Walter, bursting into the shop, and speaking incoherently and out of breath, from that time forth, for the rest of the evening. 'Here's a wonderful adventure! Here's Mr Dombey's daughter lost in the streets, and robbed of her clothes by an old witch of a woman — found by me — brought home to our parlour to rest — look here!'

'Good Heaven!' said Uncle Sol, starting back against his favourite compass-case. 'It can't be! Well, I —'

'No, nor anybody else,' said Walter, anticipating the rest. 'Nobody would, nobody could, you know. Here! just help me lift the little sofa near the fire, will

you, Uncle Sol — take care of the plates — cut some dinner for her, will you, Uncle — throw those shoes under the grate. Miss Florence — put your feet on the fender to dry — how damp they are — here's an adventure, Uncle, eh? — God bless my soul, how hot I am!

Solomon Gills was quite as hot, by sympathy, and in excessive bewilderment. He patted Florence's head, pressed her to eat, pressed her to drink, rubbed the soles of her feet with his pocket-handkerchief heated at the fire, followed his locomotive nephew with his eyes, and ears, and had no clear perception of anything except that he was being constantly knocked against and tumbled over by that excited young gentleman, as he darted about the room attempting to accomplish twenty things at once, and doing nothing at all.

'Here, wait a minute, Uncle,' he continued, catching up a candle, 'till I run upstairs, and get another jacket on, and then I'll be off.

I say, Uncle, isn't this an adventure?'

'My dear boy,' said Solomon, who, with his spectacles on his forehead and the great chronometer in his pocket, was incessantly oscillating between Florence on the sofa, and his nephew in all parts of the parlour, 'it's the most extraordinary — '

'No, but do, Uncle, please — do, Miss Florence — dinner, you know, Uncle.'

'Yes, yes, yes,' cried Solomon, cutting instantly

into a leg of mutton, as if he were catering for a giant. 'I'll take care of her, Wally! I understand. Pretty dear! Famished, of course. You go and get ready. Lord bless me! Sir Richard Whittington thrice Lord Mayor of London.'

Walter was not very long in mounting to his lofty garret and descending from it, but in the meantime Florence, overcome by fatigue, had sunk into a doze before the fire. The short interval of quiet, though only a few minutes in duration, enabled Solomon Gills so far to collect his wits as to make some little arrangements for her comfort, and to darken the room, and to screen her from the blaze. Thus, when the boy returned, she was sleeping peacefully.

'That's capital!' he whispered, giving Solomon such a hug that it squeezed a new expression into his face. 'Now I'm off. I'll just take a crust of bread with me, for I'm very hungry — and don't wake her, Uncle Sol.'

'No, no,' said Solomon. 'Pretty child.'

'Pretty, indeed!' cried Walter. 'I never saw such a face, Uncle Sol. Now I'm off.'

'That's right,' said Solomon, greatly relieved.

'I say, Uncle Sol,' cried Walter, putting his face in at the door.

'Here he is again,' said Solomon.

'How does she look now?'

'Quite happy,' said Solomon.

'That's famous! now I'm off.'

'I hope you are,' said Solomon to himself.

'I say, Uncle Sol,' cried Walter, reappearing at the door.

'Here he is again!' said Solomon.

'We met Mr Carker the Junior in the street, queerer than ever. He bade me good-bye, but came behind us here — there's an odd thing! — for when we reached the shop door, I looked round, and saw him going quietly away, like a servant who had seen me home, or a faithful dog.

How does she look now, Uncle?'

'Pretty much the same as before, Wally,' replied Uncle Sol.

'That's right. Now I am off!'

And this time he really was: and Solomon Gills, with no appetite for dinner, sat on the opposite side of the fire, watching Florence in her slumber, building a great many airy castles of the most fantastic architecture; and looking, in the dim shade, and in the close vicinity of all the instruments, like a magician disguised in a Welsh wig and a suit of coffee colour, who held the child in an enchanted sleep.

In the meantime, Walter proceeded towards Mr Dombey's house at a pace seldom achieved by a hack horse from the stand; and yet with his head out of window every two or three minutes, in impatient remonstrance with the driver. Arriving at his journey's

end, he leaped out, and breathlessly announcing his errand to the servant, followed him straight into the library, where there was a great confusion of tongues, and where Mr Dombey, his sister, and Miss Tox, Richards, and Nipper, were all congregated together.

'Oh! I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Walter, rushing up to him, 'but I'm happy to say it's all right, Sir. Miss Dombey's found!'

The boy with his open face, and flowing hair, and sparkling eyes, panting with pleasure and excitement, was wonderfully opposed to Mr Dombey, as he sat confronting him in his library chair.

'I told you, Louisa, that she would certainly be found,' said Mr Dombey, looking slightly over his shoulder at that lady, who wept in company with Miss Tox. 'Let the servants know that no further steps are necessary. This boy who brings the information, is young Gay, from the office. How was my daughter found, Sir? I know how she was lost.'

Here he looked majestically at Richards. 'But how was she found? Who found her?'

'Why, I believe I found Miss Dombey, Sir,' said Walter modestly, 'at least I don't know that I can claim the merit of having exactly found her, Sir, but I was the fortunate instrument of —'

'What do you mean, Sir,' interrupted Mr Dombey, regarding the boy's evident pride and pleasure in his share of the transaction with an instinctive dislike, 'by

not having exactly found my daughter, and by being a fortunate instrument? Be plain and coherent, if you please.'

It was quite out of Walter's power to be coherent; but he rendered himself as explanatory as he could, in his breathless state, and stated why he had come alone.

'You hear this, girl?' said Mr Dombey sternly to the black-eyed.

'Take what is necessary, and return immediately with this young man to fetch Miss Florence home. Gay, you will be rewarded to-morrow.

'Oh! thank you, Sir,' said Walter. 'You are very kind. I'm sure I was not thinking of any reward, Sir.'

'You are a boy,' said Mr Dombey, suddenly and almost fiercely; 'and what you think of, or affect to think of, is of little consequence.

You have done well, Sir. Don't undo it. Louisa, please to give the lad some wine.'

Mr Dombey's glance followed Walter Gay with sharp disfavour, as he left the room under the pilotage of Mrs Chick; and it may be that his mind's eye followed him with no greater relish, as he rode back to his Uncle's with Miss Susan Nipper.

There they found that Florence, much refreshed by sleep, had dined, and greatly improved the acquaintance of Solomon Gills, with whom she was on terms of perfect confidence and ease. The black-eyed (who had cried so much that she might now be called

the red-eyed, and who was very silent and depressed) caught her in her arms without a word of contradiction or reproach, and made a very hysterical meeting of it.

Then converting the parlour, for the nonce, into a private tiring room, she dressed her, with great care, in proper clothes; and presently led her forth, as like a Dombey as her natural disqualifications admitted of her being made.

'Good-night!' said Florence, running up to Solomon. 'You have been very good to me.'

Old Sol was quite delighted, and kissed her like her grand-father.

'Good-night, Walter! Good-bye!' said Florence.

'Good-bye!' said Walter, giving both his hands.

'I'll never forget you,' pursued Florence. 'No! indeed I never will. Good-bye, Walter!' In the innocence of her grateful heart, the child lifted up her face to his. Walter, bending down his own, raised it again, all red and burning; and looked at Uncle Sol, quite sheepishly.

'Where's Walter?' 'Good-night, Walter!' 'Good-bye, Walter!' 'Shake hands once more, Walter!' This was still Florence's cry, after she was shut up with her little maid, in the coach. And when the coach at length moved off, Walter on the door-step gaily turned the waving of her handkerchief, while the wooden Midshipman behind him seemed, like himself, intent upon that coach alone, excluding all the other passing

coaches from his observation.

In good time Mr Dombey's mansion was gained again, and again there was a noise of tongues in the library. Again, too, the coach was ordered to wait — 'for Mrs Richards,' one of Susan's fellow-servants ominously whispered, as she passed with Florence.

The entrance of the lost child made a slight sensation, but not much. Mr Dombey, who had never found her, kissed her once upon the forehead, and cautioned her not to run away again, or wander anywhere with treacherous attendants. Mrs Chick stopped in her lamentations on the corruption of human nature, even when beckoned to the paths of virtue by a Charitable Grinder; and received her with a welcome something short of the reception due to none but perfect Dombey's. Miss Tox regulated her feelings by the models before her. Richards, the culprit Richards, alone poured out her heart in broken words of welcome, and bowed herself over the little wandering head as if she really loved it.

'Ah, Richards!' said Mrs Chick, with a sigh. 'It would have been much more satisfactory to those who wish to think well of their fellow creatures, and much more becoming in you, if you had shown some proper feeling, in time, for the little child that is now going to be prematurely deprived of its natural nourishment.

'Cut off,' said Miss Tox, in a plaintive whisper, 'from one common fountain!'