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北京师联教育科学研究所 编



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CHAPTER I

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 and recrossed 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; 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!' And again he said 'Dom-bey 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. 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 dare say. 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.

Next moment, the lady had opened her eyes and seen the child; and the child had run towards her; and, standing on tip-toe, 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 ill-advised and feverish proceeding this, I am sure. I had better ask Doctor Peps if he'll have the goodness to step up stairs 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 Peps.

`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 up stairs 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 on 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 that effort successfully,' said Doctor Parker Peps, `then 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 up stairs; 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 round 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! *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 dare say 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. 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 admirably 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 tippets, boas, and muffs, which stood up on end in a 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 curtsey, ‘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 ‘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.

‘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, has been working at a little gift for Fanny, which I promised to present. It is only a pin-cushion for the toilette table, Paul, but I do say, and will say, and must say, 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 Tox in 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.

`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 before-hand, 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 any one 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. 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 up stairs 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.'

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.

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CHAPTER II

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 up stairs, 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 tol loor 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 dare say.'

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.

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

`What Baby do you mean?' answered Mrs. Chick. `I am sure the morning I have had, with that dining-room down stairs 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, it becomes necessary to provide a Nurse.'

`Oh! Ah!' said Mr. Chick. `Toor-rul--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. Meanwhile, of course, the child is--'

`Going to the very Deuce,' 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 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 unlookedfor 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 down stairs 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. 'Stream ingine.'

`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 to think of their some day claiming a sort of relationship to Paul! 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.