

## **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 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 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 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 heerd 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, Polly 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.