

Chapter XI - Paul's Introduction to a New Scene

Mrs Pipchin's constitution was made of such hard metal, in spite of its liability to the fleshly weaknesses of standing in need of repose after chops, and of requiring to be coaxed to sleep by the soporific agency of sweet-breads, that it utterly set at naught the predictions of Mrs Wickam, and showed no symptoms of decline. Yet, as Paul's rapt interest in the old lady continued unabated, Mrs Wickam would not budge an inch from the position she had taken up. Fortifying and entrenching herself on the strong ground of her Uncle's Betsey Jane, she advised Miss Berry, as a friend, to prepare herself for the worst; and forewarned her that her aunt might, at any time, be expected to go off suddenly, like a powder-mill.

'I hope, Miss Berry,' Mrs Wickam would observe, 'that you'll come into whatever little property there may be to leave. You deserve it, I am sure, for yours is a trying life. Though there don't seem much worth coming into - you'll excuse my being so open - in this dismal den.'

Poor Berry took it all in good part, and drudged and slaved away as usual; perfectly convinced that Mrs Pipchin was one of the most meritorious persons in the world, and making every day innumerable sacrifices of herself upon the altar of that noble old woman. But all these immolations of Berry were somehow carried to the credit of Mrs Pipchin by Mrs Pipchin's friends and admirers; and were made to harmonise with, and carry out, that melancholy fact of the deceased Mr Pipchin having broken his heart in the Peruvian mines.

For example, there was an honest grocer and general dealer in the retail line of business, between whom and Mrs Pipchin there was a small memorandum book, with a greasy red cover, perpetually in question, and concerning which divers secret councils and conferences were continually being held between the parties to that register, on the mat in the passage, and with closed doors in the parlour. Nor were there wanting dark hints from Master Bitherstone (whose temper had been made revengeful by the solar heats of India acting on his blood), of balances unsettled, and of a failure, on one occasion within his memory, in the supply of moist sugar at tea-time. This grocer being a bachelor and not a man who looked upon the surface for beauty, had once made honourable offers for the hand of Berry, which Mrs Pipchin had, with contumely and scorn, rejected. Everybody said how laudable this was in Mrs Pipchin, relict of a man who had died of the Peruvian mines; and what a staunch, high, independent spirit the old lady had. But nobody said anything about poor Berry, who cried for six weeks (being soundly rated by her good aunt all the time), and lapsed into a state of hopeless spinsterhood.

'Berry's very fond of you, ain't she?' Paul once asked Mrs Pipchin when they were sitting by the fire with the cat.

'Yes,' said Mrs Pipchin.

'Why?' asked Paul.

'Why!' returned the disconcerted old lady. 'How can you ask such things, Sir! why are you fond of your sister Florence?'

'Because she's very good,' said Paul. 'There's nobody like Florence.'

'Well!' retorted Mrs Pipchin, shortly, 'and there's nobody like me, I suppose.'

'Ain't there really though?' asked Paul, leaning forward in his chair, and looking at her very hard.

'No,' said the old lady.

'I am glad of that,' observed Paul, rubbing his hands thoughtfully. 'That's a very good thing.'

Mrs Pipchin didn't dare to ask him why, lest she should receive some perfectly annihilating answer. But as a compensation to her wounded feelings, she harassed Master Bitherstone to that extent until bedtime, that he began that very night to make arrangements for an overland return to India, by secreting from his supper a quarter of a round of bread and a fragment of moist Dutch cheese, as the beginning of a stock of provision to support him on the voyage.

Mrs Pipchin had kept watch and ward over little Paul and his sister for nearly twelve months. They had been home twice, but only for a few days; and had been constant in their weekly visits to Mr Dombey at the hotel. By little and little Paul had grown stronger, and had become able to dispense with his carriage; though he still looked thin and delicate; and still remained the same old, quiet, dreamy child that he had been when first consigned to Mrs Pipchin's care. One Saturday afternoon, at dusk, great consternation was occasioned in the Castle by the unlooked-for announcement of Mr Dombey as a visitor to Mrs Pipchin. The population of the parlour was immediately swept upstairs as on the wings of a whirlwind, and after much slamming of bedroom doors, and trampling overhead, and some knocking about of Master Bitherstone by Mrs Pipchin, as a relief to the perturbation of her spirits, the black bombazeen garments of the worthy old lady darkened the audience-chamber where Mr Dombey was contemplating the vacant arm-chair of his son and heir.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, 'How do you do?'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'I am pretty well, considering.'

Mrs Pipchin always used that form of words. It meant, considering her virtues, sacrifices, and so forth.

'I can't expect, Sir, to be very well,' said Mrs Pipchin, taking a chair and fetching her breath; 'but such health as I have, I am grateful for.'

Mr Dombey inclined his head with the satisfied air of a patron, who felt that this was the sort of thing for which he paid so much a quarter. After a moment's silence he went on to say:

'Mrs Pipchin, I have taken the liberty of calling, to consult you in reference to my son. I have had it in my mind to do so for some time past; but have deferred it from time to time, in order that his health might be thoroughly re-established. You have no misgivings on that subject, Mrs Pipchin?'

'Brighton has proved very beneficial, Sir,' returned Mrs Pipchin. 'Very beneficial, indeed.'

'I purpose,' said Mr Dombey, 'his remaining at Brighton.'

Mrs Pipchin rubbed her hands, and bent her grey eyes on the fire.

'But,' pursued Mr Dombey, stretching out his forefinger, 'but possibly that he should now make a change, and lead a different kind of life here. In short, Mrs Pipchin, that is the object of my visit. My son is getting on, Mrs Pipchin. Really, he is getting on.'

There was something melancholy in the triumphant air with which Mr Dombey said this. It showed how long Paul's childish life had been to him, and how his hopes were set upon a later stage of his existence. Pity may appear a strange word to connect with anyone so haughty and so cold, and yet he seemed a worthy subject for it at that moment.

'Six years old!' said Mr Dombey, settling his neckcloth - perhaps to hide an irrepressible smile that rather seemed to strike upon the surface of his face and glance away, as finding no resting-place, than to play there for an instant. 'Dear me, six will be changed to sixteen, before we have time to look about us.'

'Ten years,' croaked the unsympathetic Pipchin, with a frosty glistening of her hard grey eye, and a dreary shaking of her bent head, 'is a long time.'

'It depends on circumstances, returned Mr Dombey; 'at all events, Mrs Pipchin, my son is six years old, and there is no doubt, I fear, that in his studies he is behind many children of his age - or his youth,' said Mr Dombey, quickly answering what he mistrusted was a shrewd twinkle of the frosty eye, 'his youth is a more appropriate expression. Now, Mrs Pipchin, instead of being behind his peers, my son ought to be before them; far before them. There is an eminence ready for him to mount upon. There is nothing of chance or doubt in the course before my son. His way in life was clear and prepared, and marked out before he existed. The education of such a young gentleman must not be delayed. It must not be left imperfect. It must be very steadily and seriously undertaken, Mrs Pipchin.'

'Well, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'I can say nothing to the contrary.'

'I was quite sure, Mrs Pipchin,' returned Mr Dombey, approvingly, 'that a person of your good sense could not, and would not.'

'There is a great deal of nonsense - and worse - talked about young people not being pressed too hard at first, and being tempted on, and all the rest of it, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, impatiently rubbing her hooked nose. 'It never was thought of in my time, and it has no business to be thought of now. My opinion is 'keep 'em at it'.'

'My good madam,' returned Mr Dombey, 'you have not acquired your reputation undeservedly; and I beg you to believe, Mrs Pipchin, that I am more than satisfied with your excellent system of management, and shall have the greatest pleasure in commending it whenever my poor commendation - ' Mr Dombey's loftiness when he affected to disparage his own importance, passed all bounds - 'can be of any service. I have been thinking of Doctor Blimber's, Mrs Pipchin.'

'My neighbour, Sir?' said Mrs Pipchin. 'I believe the Doctor's is an excellent establishment. I've heard that it's very strictly conducted, and there is nothing but learning going on from morning to night.'

'And it's very expensive,' added Mr Dombey.

'And it's very expensive, Sir,' returned Mrs Pipchin, catching at the fact, as if in omitting that, she had omitted one of its leading merits.

'I have had some communication with the Doctor, Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, hitching his chair anxiously a little nearer to the fire, 'and he does not consider Paul at all too young for his purpose. He mentioned several instances of boys in Greek at about the same age. If I have any little uneasiness in my own mind, Mrs Pipchin, on the subject of this change, it is not on that head. My son not having known a mother has gradually concentrated much - too much - of his

childish affection on his sister. Whether their separation - ' Mr Dombey said no more, but sat silent.

'Hoity-toity!' exclaimed Mrs Pipchin, shaking out her black bombazeen skirts, and plucking up all the ogress within her. 'If she don't like it, Mr Dombey, she must be taught to lump it.' The good lady apologised immediately afterwards for using so common a figure of speech, but said (and truly) that that was the way she reasoned with 'em.

Mr Dombey waited until Mrs Pipchin had done bridling and shaking her head, and frowning down a legion of Bitherstones and Pankeys; and then said quietly, but correctively, 'He, my good madam, he.'

Mrs Pipchin's system would have applied very much the same mode of cure to any uneasiness on the part of Paul, too; but as the hard grey eye was sharp enough to see that the recipe, however Mr Dombey might admit its efficacy in the case of the daughter, was not a sovereign remedy for the son, she argued the point; and contended that change, and new society, and the different form of life he would lead at Doctor Blimber's, and the studies he would have to master, would very soon prove sufficient alienations. As this chimed in with Mr Dombey's own hope and belief, it gave that gentleman a still higher opinion of Mrs Pipchin's understanding; and as Mrs Pipchin, at the same time, bewailed the loss of her dear little friend (which was not an overwhelming shock to her, as she had long expected it, and had not looked, in the beginning, for his remaining with her longer than three months), he formed an equally good opinion of Mrs Pipchin's disinterestedness. It was plain that he had given the subject anxious consideration, for he had formed a plan, which he announced to the ogress, of sending Paul to the Doctor's as a weekly boarder for the first half year, during which time Florence would remain at the Castle, that she might receive her brother there, on Saturdays. This would wean him by degrees, Mr Dombey said; possibly with a recollection of his not having been weaned by degrees on a former occasion.

Mr Dombey finished the interview by expressing his hope that Mrs Pipchin would still remain in office as general superintendent and overseer of his son, pending his studies at Brighton; and having kissed Paul, and shaken hands with Florence, and beheld Master Bitherstone in his collar of state, and made Miss Pankey cry by patting her on the head (in which region she was uncommonly tender, on account of a habit Mrs Pipchin had of sounding it with her knuckles, like a cask), he withdrew to his hotel and dinner: resolved that Paul, now that he was getting so old and well, should begin a vigorous course of education forthwith, to qualify him for the position in which he was to shine; and that Doctor Blimber should take him in hand immediately.

Whenever a young gentleman was taken in hand by Doctor Blimber, he might consider himself sure of a pretty tight squeeze. The Doctor only undertook the charge of ten young gentlemen, but he had, always ready, a supply of learning for a hundred, on the lowest estimate; and it was at once the business and delight of his life to gorge the unhappy ten with it.

In fact, Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green-peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very sour ones too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances. Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other.

This was all very pleasant and ingenious, but the system of forcing was attended with its usual disadvantages. There was not the right taste about the premature productions, and they didn't keep well. Moreover, one young gentleman, with a swollen nose and an excessively large head (the oldest of the ten who had 'gone through' everything), suddenly left off blowing one day, and remained in the establishment a mere stalk. And people did say that the Doctor had rather overdone it with young Toots, and that when he began to have whiskers he left off having brains.

There young Toots was, at any rate; possessed of the gruffest of voices and the shrillest of minds; sticking ornamental pins into his shirt, and keeping a ring in his waistcoat pocket to put on his little finger by stealth, when the pupils went out walking; constantly falling in love by sight with nurserymaids, who had no idea of his existence; and looking at the gas-lighted world over the little iron bars in the left-hand corner window of the front three pairs of stairs, after bed-time, like a greatly overgrown cherub who had sat up aloft much too long.

The Doctor was a portly gentleman in a suit of black, with strings at his knees, and stockings below them. He had a bald head, highly polished; a deep voice; and a chin so very double, that it was a wonder how he ever managed to shave into the creases. He had likewise a pair of little eyes that were always half shut up, and a mouth that was always half expanded into a grin, as if he had, that moment, posed a boy, and were waiting to convict him from his own lips. Inasmuch, that when the Doctor put his right hand into the breast of his coat, and with his other hand behind him, and a scarcely perceptible wag of

his head, made the commonest observation to a nervous stranger, it was like a sentiment from the sphynx, and settled his business.

The Doctor's was a mighty fine house, fronting the sea. Not a joyful style of house within, but quite the contrary. Sad-coloured curtains, whose proportions were spare and lean, hid themselves despondently behind the windows. The tables and chairs were put away in rows, like figures in a sum; fires were so rarely lighted in the rooms of ceremony, that they felt like wells, and a visitor represented the bucket; the dining-room seemed the last place in the world where any eating or drinking was likely to occur; there was no sound through all the house but the ticking of a great clock in the hall, which made itself audible in the very garrets; and sometimes a dull cooing of young gentlemen at their lessons, like the murmurings of an assemblage of melancholy pigeons.

Miss Blimber, too, although a slim and graceful maid, did no soft violence to the gravity of the house. There was no light nonsense about Miss Blimber. She kept her hair short and crisp, and wore spectacles. She was dry and sandy with working in the graves of deceased languages. None of your live languages for Miss Blimber. They must be dead - stone dead - and then Miss Blimber dug them up like a Ghoul.

Mrs Blimber, her Mama, was not learned herself, but she pretended to be, and that did quite as well. She said at evening parties, that if she could have known Cicero, she thought she could have died contented. It was the steady joy of her life to see the Doctor's young gentlemen go out walking, unlike all other young gentlemen, in the largest possible shirt-collars, and the stiffest possible cravats. It was so classical, she said.

As to Mr Feeder, B.A., Doctor Blimber's assistant, he was a kind of human barrel-organ, with a little list of tunes at which he was continually working, over and over again, without any variation. He might have been fitted up with a change of barrels, perhaps, in early life, if his destiny had been favourable; but it had not been; and he had only one, with which, in a monotonous round, it was his occupation to bewilder the young ideas of Doctor Blimber's young gentlemen. The young gentlemen were prematurely full of carking anxieties. They knew no rest from the pursuit of stony-hearted verbs, savage noun-substantives, inflexible syntactic passages, and ghosts of exercises that appeared to them in their dreams. Under the forcing system, a young gentleman usually took leave of his spirits in three weeks. He had all the cares of the world on his head in three months. He conceived bitter sentiments against his parents or guardians in four; he was an old misanthrope, in five; envied Curtius that blessed refuge in the earth, in six; and at the end of the first twelvemonth had

arrived at the conclusion, from which he never afterwards departed, that all the fancies of the poets, and lessons of the sages, were a mere collection of words and grammar, and had no other meaning in the world.

But he went on blow, blow, blowing, in the Doctor's hothouse, all the time; and the Doctor's glory and reputation were great, when he took his wintry growth home to his relations and friends.

Upon the Doctor's door-steps one day, Paul stood with a fluttering heart, and with his small right hand in his father's. His other hand was locked in that of Florence. How tight the tiny pressure of that one; and how loose and cold the other!

Mrs Pipchin hovered behind the victim, with her sable plumage and her hooked beak, like a bird of ill-omen. She was out of breath - for Mr Dombey, full of great thoughts, had walked fast - and she croaked hoarsely as she waited for the opening of the door.

'Now, Paul,' said Mr Dombey, exultingly. 'This is the way indeed to be Dombey and Son, and have money. You are almost a man already.'

'Almost,' returned the child.

Even his childish agitation could not master the sly and quaint yet touching look, with which he accompanied the reply.

It brought a vague expression of dissatisfaction into Mr Dombey's face; but the door being opened, it was quickly gone

'Doctor Blimber is at home, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

The man said yes; and as they passed in, looked at Paul as if he were a little mouse, and the house were a trap. He was a weak-eyed young man, with the first faint streaks or early dawn of a grin on his countenance. It was mere imbecility; but Mrs Pipchin took it into her head that it was impudence, and made a snap at him directly.

'How dare you laugh behind the gentleman's back?' said Mrs Pipchin. 'And what do you take me for?'

'I ain't a laughing at nobody, and I'm sure I don't take you for nothing, Ma'am,' returned the young man, in consternation.

'A pack of idle dogs!' said Mrs Pipchin, 'only fit to be turnspits. Go and tell your master that Mr Dombey's here, or it'll be worse for you!'

The weak-eyed young man went, very meekly, to discharge himself of this commission; and soon came back to invite them to the Doctor's study.

'You're laughing again, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, when it came to her turn, bringing up the rear, to pass him in the hall.

'I ain't,' returned the young man, grievously oppressed. 'I never see such a thing as this!'

'What is the matter, Mrs Pipchin?' said Mr Dombey, looking round. 'Softly! Pray!'

Mrs Pipchin, in her deference, merely muttered at the young man as she passed on, and said, 'Oh! he was a precious fellow' - leaving the young man, who was all meekness and incapacity, affected even to tears by the incident. But Mrs Pipchin had a way of falling foul of all meek people; and her friends said who could wonder at it, after the Peruvian mines!

The Doctor was sitting in his portentous study, with a globe at each knee, books all round him, Homer over the door, and Minerva on the mantel-shelf. 'And how do you do, Sir?' he said to Mr Dombey, 'and how is my little friend?' Grave as an organ was the Doctor's speech; and when he ceased, the great clock in the hall seemed (to Paul at least) to take him up, and to go on saying, 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' over and over and over again.

The little friend being something too small to be seen at all from where the Doctor sat, over the books on his table, the Doctor made several futile attempts to get a view of him round the legs; which Mr Dombey perceiving, relieved the Doctor from his embarrassment by taking Paul up in his arms, and sitting him on another little table, over against the Doctor, in the middle of the room.

'Ha!' said the Doctor, leaning back in his chair with his hand in his breast. 'Now I see my little friend. How do you do, my little friend?'

The clock in the hall wouldn't subscribe to this alteration in the form of words, but continued to repeat how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?'

'Very well, I thank you, Sir,' returned Paul, answering the clock quite as much as the Doctor.

'Ha!' said Doctor Blimber. 'Shall we make a man of him?'

'Do you hear, Paul?' added Mr Dombey; Paul being silent.

'Shall we make a man of him?' repeated the Doctor.

'I had rather be a child,' replied Paul.

'Indeed!' said the Doctor. 'Why?'

The child sat on the table looking at him, with a curious expression of suppressed emotion in his face, and beating one hand proudly on his knee as if he had the rising tears beneath it, and crushed them. But his other hand strayed a little way the while, a little farther - farther from him yet - until it lighted on the neck of Florence. 'This is why,' it seemed to say, and then the steady look was broken up and gone; the working lip was loosened; and the tears came streaming forth.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said his father, in a querulous manner, 'I am really very sorry to see this.'

'Come away from him, do, Miss Dombey,' quoth the matron.

'Never mind,' said the Doctor, blandly nodding his head, to keep Mrs Pipchin back. 'Never mind; we shall substitute new cares and new impressions, Mr Dombey, very shortly. You would still wish my little friend to acquire - '

'Everything, if you please, Doctor,' returned Mr Dombey, firmly.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, who, with his half-shut eyes, and his usual smile, seemed to survey Paul with the sort of interest that might attach to some choice little animal he was going to stuff. 'Yes, exactly. Ha! We shall impart a great variety of information to our little friend, and bring him quickly forward, I daresay. I daresay. Quite a virgin soil, I believe you said, Mr Dombey?'

'Except some ordinary preparation at home, and from this lady,' replied Mr Dombey, introducing Mrs Pipchin, who instantly communicated a rigidity to her whole muscular system, and snorted defiance beforehand, in case the Doctor should disparage her; 'except so far, Paul has, as yet, applied himself to no studies at all.'

Doctor Blimber inclined his head, in gentle tolerance of such insignificant poaching as Mrs Pipchin's, and said he was glad to hear it. It was much more satisfactory, he observed, rubbing his hands, to begin at the foundation. And again he leered at Paul, as if he would have liked to tackle him with the Greek alphabet, on the spot.

'That circumstance, indeed, Doctor Blimber,' pursued Mr Dombey, glancing at his little son, 'and the interview I have already had the pleasure of holding with you, renders any further explanation, and

consequently, any further intrusion on your valuable time, so unnecessary, that - '

'Now, Miss Dombey!' said the acid Pipchin.

'Permit me,' said the Doctor, 'one moment. Allow me to present Mrs Blimber and my daughter; who will be associated with the domestic life of our young Pilgrim to Parnassus Mrs Blimber,' for the lady, who had perhaps been in waiting, opportunely entered, followed by her daughter, that fair Sexton in spectacles, 'Mr Dombey. My daughter Cornelia, Mr Dombey. Mr Dombey, my love,' pursued the Doctor, turning to his wife, 'is so confiding as to - do you see our little friend?'

Mrs Blimber, in an excess of politeness, of which Mr Dombey was the object, apparently did not, for she was backing against the little friend, and very much endangering his position on the table. But, on this hint, she turned to admire his classical and intellectual lineaments, and turning again to Mr Dombey, said, with a sigh, that she envied his dear son.

'Like a bee, Sir,' said Mrs Blimber, with uplifted eyes, 'about to plunge into a garden of the choicest flowers, and sip the sweets for the first time Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Terence, Plautus, Cicero. What a world of honey have we here. It may appear remarkable, Mr Dombey, in one who is a wife - the wife of such a husband - '

'Hush, hush,' said Doctor Blimber. 'Fie for shame.'

'Mr Dombey will forgive the partiality of a wife,' said Mrs Blimber, with an engaging smile.

Mr Dombey answered 'Not at all:' applying those words, it is to be presumed, to the partiality, and not to the forgiveness.

'And it may seem remarkable in one who is a mother also,' resumed Mrs Blimber.

'And such a mother,' observed Mr Dombey, bowing with some confused idea of being complimentary to Cornelia.

'But really,' pursued Mrs Blimber, 'I think if I could have known Cicero, and been his friend, and talked with him in his retirement at Tusculum (beau-ti-ful Tusculum!), I could have died contented.'

A learned enthusiasm is so very contagious, that Mr Dombey half believed this was exactly his case; and even Mrs Pipchin, who was not, as we have seen, of an accommodating disposition generally, gave utterance to a little sound between a groan and a sigh, as if she would

have said that nobody but Cicero could have proved a lasting consolation under that failure of the Peruvian Mines, but that he indeed would have been a very Davy-lamp of refuge.

Cornelia looked at Mr Dombey through her spectacles, as if she would have liked to crack a few quotations with him from the authority in question. But this design, if she entertained it, was frustrated by a knock at the room-door.

'Who is that?' said the Doctor. 'Oh! Come in, Toots; come in. Mr Dombey, Sir.' Toots bowed. 'Quite a coincidence!' said Doctor Blimber. 'Here we have the beginning and the end. Alpha and Omega Our head boy, Mr Dombey.'

The Doctor might have called him their head and shoulders boy, for he was at least that much taller than any of the rest. He blushed very much at finding himself among strangers, and chuckled aloud.

'An addition to our little Portico, Toots,' said the Doctor; 'Mr Dombey's son.'

Young Toots blushed again; and finding, from a solemn silence which prevailed, that he was expected to say something, said to Paul, 'How are you?' in a voice so deep, and a manner so sheepish, that if a lamb had roared it couldn't have been more surprising.

'Ask Mr Feeder, if you please, Toots,' said the Doctor, 'to prepare a few introductory volumes for Mr Dombey's son, and to allot him a convenient seat for study. My dear, I believe Mr Dombey has not seen the dormitories.'

'If Mr Dombey will walk upstairs,' said Mrs Blimber, 'I shall be more than proud to show him the dominions of the drowsy god.'

With that, Mrs Blimber, who was a lady of great suavity, and a wiry figure, and who wore a cap composed of sky-blue materials, pied upstairs with Mr Dombey and Cornelia; Mrs Pipchin following, and looking out sharp for her enemy the footman.

While they were gone, Paul sat upon the table, holding Florence by the hand, and glancing timidly from the Doctor round and round the room, while the Doctor, leaning back in his chair, with his hand in his breast as usual, held a book from him at arm's length, and read. There was something very awful in this manner of reading. It was such a determined, unimpassioned, inflexible, cold-blooded way of going to work. It left the Doctor's countenance exposed to view; and when the Doctor smiled suspiciously at his author, or knit his brows,

or shook his head and made wry faces at him, as much as to say, 'Don't tell me, Sir; I know better,' it was terrific.

Toots, too, had no business to be outside the door, ostentatiously examining the wheels in his watch, and counting his half-crowns. But that didn't last long; for Doctor Blimber, happening to change the position of his tight plump legs, as if he were going to get up, Toots swiftly vanished, and appeared no more.

Mr Dombey and his conductress were soon heard coming downstairs again, talking all the way; and presently they re-entered the Doctor's study.

'I hope, Mr Dombey,' said the Doctor, laying down his book, 'that the arrangements meet your approval.'

'They are excellent, Sir,' said Mr Dombey.

'Very fair, indeed,' said Mrs Pipchin, in a low voice; never disposed to give too much encouragement.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, wheeling round, 'will, with your permission, Doctor and Mrs Blimber, visit Paul now and then.'

'Whenever Mrs Pipchin pleases,' observed the Doctor.

'Always happy to see her,' said Mrs Blimber.

'I think,' said Mr Dombey, 'I have given all the trouble I need, and may take my leave. Paul, my child,' he went close to him, as he sat upon the table. 'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Papa.'

The limp and careless little hand that Mr Dombey took in his, was singularly out of keeping with the wistful face. But he had no part in its sorrowful expression. It was not addressed to him. No, no. To Florence - all to Florence.

If Mr Dombey in his insolence of wealth, had ever made an enemy, hard to appease and cruelly vindictive in his hate, even such an enemy might have received the pang that wrung his proud heart then, as compensation for his injury.

He bent down, over his boy, and kissed him. If his sight were dimmed as he did so, by something that for a moment blurred the little face, and made it indistinct to him, his mental vision may have been, for that short time, the clearer perhaps.

'I shall see you soon, Paul. You are free on Saturdays and Sundays, you know.'

'Yes, Papa,' returned Paul: looking at his sister. 'On Saturdays and Sundays.'

'And you'll try and learn a great deal here, and be a clever man,' said Mr Dombey; 'won't you?'

'I'll try,' returned the child, wearily.

'And you'll soon be grown up now!' said Mr Dombey.

'Oh! very soon!' replied the child. Once more the old, old look passed rapidly across his features like a strange light. It fell on Mrs Pipchin, and extinguished itself in her black dress. That excellent ogress stepped forward to take leave and to bear off Florence, which she had long been thirsting to do. The move on her part roused Mr Dombey, whose eyes were fixed on Paul. After patting him on the head, and pressing his small hand again, he took leave of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, with his usual polite frigidity, and walked out of the study.

Despite his entreaty that they would not think of stirring, Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber all pressed forward to attend him to the hall; and thus Mrs Pipchin got into a state of entanglement with Miss Blimber and the Doctor, and was crowded out of the study before she could clutch Florence. To which happy accident Paul stood afterwards indebted for the dear remembrance, that Florence ran back to throw her arms round his neck, and that hers was the last face in the doorway: turned towards him with a smile of encouragement, the brighter for the tears through which it beamed.

It made his childish bosom heave and swell when it was gone; and sent the globes, the books, blind Homer and Minerva, swimming round the room. But they stopped, all of a sudden; and then he heard the loud clock in the hall still gravely inquiring 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' as it had done before.

He sat, with folded hands, upon his pedestal, silently listening. But he might have answered 'weary, weary! very lonely, very sad!' And there, with an aching void in his young heart, and all outside so cold, and bare, and strange, Paul sat as if he had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming.