

### **Chapter XIII - Shipping Intelligence and Office Business**

Mr Dombey's offices were in a court where there was an old-established stall of choice fruit at the corner: where perambulating merchants, of both sexes, offered for sale at any time between the hours of ten and five, slippers, pocket-books, sponges, dogs' collars, and Windsor soap; and sometimes a pointer or an oil-painting.

The pointer always came that way, with a view to the Stock Exchange, where a sporting taste (originating generally in bets of new hats) is much in vogue. The other commodities were addressed to the general public; but they were never offered by the vendors to Mr Dombey. When he appeared, the dealers in those wares fell off respectfully. The principal slipper and dogs' collar man - who considered himself a public character, and whose portrait was screwed on to an artist's door in Cheapside - threw up his forefinger to the brim of his hat as Mr Dombey went by. The ticket-porter, if he were not absent on a job, always ran officiously before, to open Mr Dombey's office door as wide as possible, and hold it open, with his hat off, while he entered.

The clerks within were not a whit behind-hand in their demonstrations of respect. A solemn hush prevailed, as Mr Dombey passed through the outer office. The wit of the Counting-House became in a moment as mute as the row of leathern fire-buckets hanging up behind him. Such vapid and flat daylight as filtered through the ground-glass windows and skylights, leaving a black sediment upon the panes, showed the books and papers, and the figures bending over them, enveloped in a studious gloom, and as much abstracted in appearance, from the world without, as if they were assembled at the bottom of the sea; while a mouldy little strong room in the obscure perspective, where a shaded lamp was always burning, might have represented the cavern of some ocean monster, looking on with a red eye at these mysteries of the deep.

When Perch the messenger, whose place was on a little bracket, like a timepiece, saw Mr Dombey come in - or rather when he felt that he was coming, for he had usually an instinctive sense of his approach - he hurried into Mr Dombey's room, stirred the fire, carried fresh coals from the bowels of the coal-box, hung the newspaper to air upon the fender, put the chair ready, and the screen in its place, and was round upon his heel on the instant of Mr Dombey's entrance, to take his great-coat and hat, and hang them up. Then Perch took the newspaper, and gave it a turn or two in his hands before the fire, and laid it, deferentially, at Mr Dombey's elbow. And so little objection had Perch to being deferential in the last degree, that if he might have laid himself at Mr Dombey's feet, or might have called him by some such title as used to be bestowed upon the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, he would have been all the better pleased.

As this honour would have been an innovation and an experiment, Perch was fain to content himself by expressing as well as he could, in his manner, You are the light of my Eyes. You are the Breath of my Soul. You are the commander of the Faithful Perch! With this imperfect happiness to cheer him, he would shut the door softly, walk away on tiptoe, and leave his great chief to be stared at, through a dome-shaped window in the leads, by ugly chimney-pots and backs of houses, and especially by the bold window of a hair-cutting saloon on a first floor, where a waxen effigy, bald as a Mussulman in the morning, and covered, after eleven o'clock in the day, with luxuriant hair and whiskers in the latest Christian fashion, showed him the wrong side of its head for ever.

Between Mr Dombey and the common world, as it was accessible through the medium of the outer office - to which Mr Dombey's presence in his own room may be said to have struck like damp, or cold air - there were two degrees of descent. Mr Carker in his own office was the first step; Mr Morfin, in his own office, was the second. Each of these gentlemen occupied a little chamber like a bath-room, opening from the passage outside Mr Dombey's door. Mr Carker, as Grand Vizier, inhabited the room that was nearest to the Sultan. Mr Morfin, as an officer of inferior state, inhabited the room that was nearest to the clerks.

The gentleman last mentioned was a cheerful-looking, hazel-eyed elderly bachelor: gravely attired, as to his upper man, in black; and as to his legs, in pepper-and-salt colour. His dark hair was just touched here and there with specks of gray, as though the tread of Time had splashed it; and his whiskers were already white. He had a mighty respect for Mr Dombey, and rendered him due homage; but as he was of a genial temper himself, and never wholly at his ease in that stately presence, he was disquieted by no jealousy of the many conferences enjoyed by Mr Carker, and felt a secret satisfaction in having duties to discharge, which rarely exposed him to be singled out for such distinction. He was a great musical amateur in his way - after business; and had a paternal affection for his violoncello, which was once in every week transported from Islington, his place of abode, to a certain club-room hard by the Bank, where quartettes of the most tormenting and excruciating nature were executed every Wednesday evening by a private party.

Mr Carker was a gentleman thirty-eight or forty years old, of a florid complexion, and with two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing. It was impossible to escape the observation of them, for he showed them whenever he spoke; and bore so wide a smile upon his countenance (a smile, however, very rarely, indeed, extending beyond his mouth), that there was something in it like the snarl of a cat. He affected a stiff white

cravat, after the example of his principal, and was always closely buttoned up and tightly dressed. His manner towards Mr Dombey was deeply conceived and perfectly expressed. He was familiar with him, in the very extremity of his sense of the distance between them. 'Mr Dombey, to a man in your position from a man in mine, there is no show of subservience compatible with the transaction of business between us, that I should think sufficient. I frankly tell you, Sir, I give it up altogether. I feel that I could not satisfy my own mind; and Heaven knows, Mr Dombey, you can afford to dispense with the endeavour.' If he had carried these words about with him printed on a placard, and had constantly offered it to Mr Dombey's perusal on the breast of his coat, he could not have been more explicit than he was.

This was Carker the Manager. Mr Carker the Junior, Walter's friend, was his brother; two or three years older than he, but widely removed in station. The younger brother's post was on the top of the official ladder; the elder brother's at the bottom. The elder brother never gained a stave, or raised his foot to mount one. Young men passed above his head, and rose and rose; but he was always at the bottom. He was quite resigned to occupy that low condition: never complained of it: and certainly never hoped to escape from it.

'How do you do this morning?' said Mr Carker the Manager, entering Mr Dombey's room soon after his arrival one day: with a bundle of papers in his hand.

'How do you do, Carker?' said Mr Dombey.

'Coolish!' observed Carker, stirring the fire.

'Rather,' said Mr Dombey.

'Any news of the young gentleman who is so important to us all?' asked Carker, with his whole regiment of teeth on parade.

'Yes - not direct news- I hear he's very well,' said Mr Dombey. Who had come from Brighton over-night. But no one knew It.

'Very well, and becoming a great scholar, no doubt?' observed the Manager.

'I hope so,' returned Mr Dombey.

'Egad!' said Mr Carker, shaking his head, 'Time flies!'

'I think so, sometimes,' returned Mr Dombey, glancing at his newspaper.

'Oh! You! You have no reason to think so,' observed Carker. 'One who sits on such an elevation as yours, and can sit there, unmoved, in all seasons - hasn't much reason to know anything about the flight of time. It's men like myself, who are low down and are not superior in circumstances, and who inherit new masters in the course of Time, that have cause to look about us. I shall have a rising sun to worship, soon.'

'Time enough, time enough, Carker!' said Mr Dombey, rising from his chair, and standing with his back to the fire. 'Have you anything there for me?'

'I don't know that I need trouble you,' returned Carker, turning over the papers in his hand. 'You have a committee today at three, you know.'

'And one at three, three-quarters,' added Mr Dombey.

'Catch you forgetting anything!' exclaimed Carker, still turning over his papers. 'If Mr Paul inherits your memory, he'll be a troublesome customer in the House. One of you is enough'

'You have an accurate memory of your own,' said Mr Dombey.

'Oh! I!' returned the manager. 'It's the only capital of a man like me.'

Mr Dombey did not look less pompous or at all displeased, as he stood leaning against the chimney-piece, surveying his (of course unconscious) clerk, from head to foot. The stiffness and nicety of Mr Carker's dress, and a certain arrogance of manner, either natural to him or imitated from a pattern not far off, gave great additional effect to his humility. He seemed a man who would contend against the power that vanquished him, if he could, but who was utterly borne down by the greatness and superiority of Mr Dombey.

'Is Morfin here?' asked Mr Dombey after a short pause, during which Mr Carker had been fluttering his papers, and muttering little abstracts of their contents to himself.

'Morfin's here,' he answered, looking up with his widest and almost sudden smile; 'humming musical recollections - of his last night's quartette party, I suppose - through the walls between us, and driving me half mad. I wish he'd make a bonfire of his violoncello, and burn his music-books in it.'

'You respect nobody, Carker, I think,' said Mr Dombey.

'No?' inquired Carker, with another wide and most feline show of his teeth. 'Well! Not many people, I believe. I wouldn't answer perhaps,' he murmured, as if he were only thinking it, 'for more than one.'

A dangerous quality, if real; and a not less dangerous one, if feigned. But Mr Dombey hardly seemed to think so, as he still stood with his back to the fire, drawn up to his full height, and looking at his head-clerk with a dignified composure, in which there seemed to lurk a stronger latent sense of power than usual.

'Talking of Morfin,' resumed Mr Carker, taking out one paper from the rest, 'he reports a junior dead in the agency at Barbados, and proposes to reserve a passage in the Son and Heir - she'll sail in a month or so - for the successor. You don't care who goes, I suppose? We have nobody of that sort here.'

Mr Dombey shook his head with supreme indifference.

'It's no very precious appointment,' observed Mr Carker, taking up a pen, with which to endorse a memorandum on the back of the paper. 'I hope he may bestow it on some orphan nephew of a musical friend. It may perhaps stop his fiddle-playing, if he has a gift that way. Who's that? Come in!'

'I beg your pardon, Mr Carker. I didn't know you were here, Sir,' answered Walter; appearing with some letters in his hand, unopened, and newly arrived. 'Mr Carker the junior, Sir - '

At the mention of this name, Mr Carker the Manager was or affected to be, touched to the quick with shame and humiliation. He cast his eyes full on Mr Dombey with an altered and apologetic look, abased them on the ground, and remained for a moment without speaking.

'I thought, Sir,' he said suddenly and angrily, turning on Walter, 'that you had been before requested not to drag Mr Carker the Junior into your conversation.'

'I beg your pardon,' returned Walter. 'I was only going to say that Mr Carker the Junior had told me he believed you were gone out, or I should not have knocked at the door when you were engaged with Mr Dombey. These are letters for Mr Dombey, Sir.'

'Very well, Sir,' returned Mr Carker the Manager, plucking them sharply from his hand. 'Go about your business.'

But in taking them with so little ceremony, Mr Carker dropped one on the floor, and did not see what he had done; neither did Mr Dombey observe the letter lying near his feet. Walter hesitated for a moment,

thinking that one or other of them would notice it; but finding that neither did, he stopped, came back, picked it up, and laid it himself on Mr Dombey's desk. The letters were post-letters; and it happened that the one in question was Mrs Pipchin's regular report, directed as usual - for Mrs Pipchin was but an indifferent penwoman - by Florence. Mr Dombey, having his attention silently called to this letter by Walter, started, and looked fiercely at him, as if he believed that he had purposely selected it from all the rest.

'You can leave the room, Sir!' said Mr Dombey, haughtily.

He crushed the letter in his hand; and having watched Walter out at the door, put it in his pocket without breaking the seal.

'These continual references to Mr Carker the Junior,' Mr Carker the Manager began, as soon as they were alone, 'are, to a man in my position, uttered before one in yours, so unspeakably distressing - '

'Nonsense, Carker,' Mr Dombey interrupted. 'You are too sensitive.'

'I am sensitive,' he returned. 'If one in your position could by any possibility imagine yourself in my place: which you cannot: you would be so too.'

As Mr Dombey's thoughts were evidently pursuing some other subject, his discreet ally broke off here, and stood with his teeth ready to present to him, when he should look up.

'You want somebody to send to the West Indies, you were saying,' observed Mr Dombey, hurriedly.

'Yes,' replied Carker.

'Send young Gay.'

'Good, very good indeed. Nothing easier,' said Mr Carker, without any show of surprise, and taking up the pen to re-endorse the letter, as coolly as he had done before. "Send young Gay."

'Call him back,' said Mr Dombey.

Mr Carker was quick to do so, and Walter was quick to return.

'Gay,' said Mr Dombey, turning a little to look at him over his shoulder. 'Here is a -

'An opening,' said Mr Carker, with his mouth stretched to the utmost.

'In the West Indies. At Barbados. I am going to send you,' said Mr Dombey, scorning to embellish the bare truth, 'to fill a junior situation in the counting-house at Barbados. Let your Uncle know from me, that I have chosen you to go to the West Indies.'

Walter's breath was so completely taken away by his astonishment, that he could hardly find enough for the repetition of the words 'West Indies.'

'Somebody must go,' said Mr Dombey, 'and you are young and healthy, and your Uncle's circumstances are not good. Tell your Uncle that you are appointed. You will not go yet. There will be an interval of a month - or two perhaps.'

'Shall I remain there, Sir?' inquired Walter.

'Will you remain there, Sir!' repeated Mr Dombey, turning a little more round towards him. 'What do you mean? What does he mean, Carker?'

'Live there, Sir,' faltered Walter.

'Certainly,' returned Mr Dombey.

Walter bowed.

'That's all,' said Mr Dombey, resuming his letters. 'You will explain to him in good time about the usual outfit and so forth, Carker, of course. He needn't wait, Carker.'

'You needn't wait, Gay,' observed Mr Carker: bare to the gums.

'Unless,' said Mr Dombey, stopping in his reading without looking off the letter, and seeming to listen. 'Unless he has anything to say.'

'No, Sir,' returned Walter, agitated and confused, and almost stunned, as an infinite variety of pictures presented themselves to his mind; among which Captain Cuttle, in his glazed hat, transfixed with astonishment at Mrs MacStinger's, and his uncle bemoaning his loss in the little back parlour, held prominent places. 'I hardly know - I - I am much obliged, Sir.'

'He needn't wait, Carker,' said Mr Dombey.

And as Mr Carker again echoed the words, and also collected his papers as if he were going away too, Walter felt that his lingering any longer would be an unpardonable intrusion - especially as he had nothing to say - and therefore walked out quite confounded.

Going along the passage, with the mingled consciousness and helplessness of a dream, he heard Mr Dombey's door shut again, as Mr Carker came out: and immediately afterwards that gentleman called to him.

'Bring your friend Mr Carker the Junior to my room, Sir, if you please.'

Walter went to the outer office and apprised Mr Carker the Junior of his errand, who accordingly came out from behind a partition where he sat alone in one corner, and returned with him to the room of Mr Carker the Manager.

That gentleman was standing with his back to the fire, and his hands under his coat-tails, looking over his white cravat, as unpromisingly as Mr Dombey himself could have looked. He received them without any change in his attitude or softening of his harsh and black expression: merely signing to Walter to close the door.

'John Carker,' said the Manager, when this was done, turning suddenly upon his brother, with his two rows of teeth bristling as if he would have bitten him, 'what is the league between you and this young man, in virtue of which I am haunted and hunted by the mention of your name? Is it not enough for you, John Carker, that I am your near relation, and can't detach myself from that - '

'Say disgrace, James,' interposed the other in a low voice, finding that he stammered for a word. 'You mean it, and have reason, say disgrace.'

'From that disgrace,' assented his brother with keen emphasis, 'but is the fact to be blurted out and trumpeted, and proclaimed continually in the presence of the very House! In moments of confidence too? Do you think your name is calculated to harmonise in this place with trust and confidence, John Carker?'

'No,' returned the other. 'No, James. God knows I have no such thought.'

'What is your thought, then?' said his brother, 'and why do you thrust yourself in my way? Haven't you injured me enough already?'

'I have never injured you, James, wilfully.'

'You are my brother,' said the Manager. 'That's injury enough.'

'I wish I could undo it, James.'

'I wish you could and would.'



During this conversation, Walter had looked from one brother to the other, with pain and amazement. He who was the Senior in years, and Junior in the House, stood, with his eyes cast upon the ground, and his head bowed, humbly listening to the reproaches of the other. Though these were rendered very bitter by the tone and look with which they were accompanied, and by the presence of Walter whom they so much surprised and shocked, he entered no other protest against them than by slightly raising his right hand in a deprecatory manner, as if he would have said, 'Spare me!' So, had they been blows, and he a brave man, under strong constraint, and weakened by bodily suffering, he might have stood before the executioner.

Generous and quick in all his emotions, and regarding himself as the innocent occasion of these taunts, Walter now struck in, with all the earnestness he felt.

'Mr Carker,' he said, addressing himself to the Manager. 'Indeed, indeed, this is my fault solely. In a kind of heedlessness, for which I cannot blame myself enough, I have, I have no doubt, mentioned Mr Carker the Junior much oftener than was necessary; and have allowed his name sometimes to slip through my lips, when it was against your expressed wish. But it has been my own mistake, Sir. We have never exchanged one word upon the subject - very few, indeed, on any subject. And it has not been,' added Walter, after a moment's pause, 'all heedlessness on my part, Sir; for I have felt an interest in Mr Carker ever since I have been here, and have hardly been able to help speaking of him sometimes, when I have thought of him so much!'

Walter said this from his soul, and with the very breath of honour. For he looked upon the bowed head, and the downcast eyes, and upraised hand, and thought, 'I have felt it; and why should I not avow it in behalf of this unfriended, broken man!'

Mr Carker the Manager looked at him, as he spoke, and when he had finished speaking, with a smile that seemed to divide his face into two parts.

'You are an excitable youth, Gay,' he said; 'and should endeavour to cool down a little now, for it would be unwise to encourage feverish predispositions. Be as cool as you can, Gay. Be as cool as you can. You might have asked Mr John Carker himself (if you have not done so) whether he claims to be, or is, an object of such strong interest.'

'James, do me justice,' said his brother. 'I have claimed nothing; and I claim nothing. Believe me, on my -'

'Honour?' said his brother, with another smile, as he warmed himself before the fire.

'On my Me - on my fallen life!' returned the other, in the same low voice, but with a deeper stress on his words than he had yet seemed capable of giving them. 'Believe me, I have held myself aloof, and kept alone. This has been unsought by me. I have avoided him and everyone.

'Indeed, you have avoided me, Mr Carker,' said Walter, with the tears rising to his eyes; so true was his compassion. 'I know it, to my disappointment and regret. When I first came here, and ever since, I am sure I have tried to be as much your friend, as one of my age could presume to be; but it has been of no use.

'And observe,' said the Manager, taking him up quickly, 'it will be of still less use, Gay, if you persist in forcing Mr John Carker's name on people's attention. That is not the way to befriend Mr John Carker. Ask him if he thinks it is.'

'It is no service to me,' said the brother. 'It only leads to such a conversation as the present, which I need not say I could have well spared. No one can be a better friend to me:' he spoke here very distinctly, as if he would impress it upon Walter: 'than in forgetting me, and leaving me to go my way, unquestioned and unnoticed.'

'Your memory not being retentive, Gay, of what you are told by others,' said Mr Carker the Manager, warming himself with great and increased satisfaction, 'I thought it well that you should be told this from the best authority,' nodding towards his brother. 'You are not likely to forget it now, I hope. That's all, Gay. You can go.

Walter passed out at the door, and was about to close it after him, when, hearing the voices of the brothers again, and also the mention of his own name, he stood irresolutely, with his hand upon the lock, and the door ajar, uncertain whether to return or go away. In this position he could not help overhearing what followed.

'Think of me more leniently, if you can, James,' said John Carker, 'when I tell you I have had - how could I help having, with my history, written here' - striking himself upon the breast - 'my whole heart awakened by my observation of that boy, Walter Gay. I saw in him when he first came here, almost my other self.'

'Your other self!' repeated the Manager, disdainfully.

'Not as I am, but as I was when I first came here too; as sanguine, giddy, youthful, inexperienced; flushed with the same restless and

adventurous fancies; and full of the same qualities, fraught with the same capacity of leading on to good or evil.'

'I hope not,' said his brother, with some hidden and sarcastic meaning in his tone.

'You strike me sharply; and your hand is steady, and your thrust is very deep,' returned the other, speaking (or so Walter thought) as if some cruel weapon actually stabbed him as he spoke. 'I imagined all this when he was a boy. I believed it. It was a truth to me. I saw him lightly walking on the edge of an unseen gulf where so many others walk with equal gaiety, and from which

'The old excuse,' interrupted his brother, as he stirred the fire. 'So many. Go on. Say, so many fall.'

'From which ONE traveller fell,' returned the other, 'who set forward, on his way, a boy like him, and missed his footing more and more, and slipped a little and a little lower; and went on stumbling still, until he fell headlong and found himself below a shattered man. Think what I suffered, when I watched that boy.'

'You have only yourself to thank for it,' returned the brother.

'Only myself,' he assented with a sigh. 'I don't seek to divide the blame or shame.'

'You have divided the shame,' James Carker muttered through his teeth. And, through so many and such close teeth, he could mutter well.

'Ah, James,' returned his brother, speaking for the first time in an accent of reproach, and seeming, by the sound of his voice, to have covered his face with his hands, 'I have been, since then, a useful foil to you. You have trodden on me freely in your climbing up. Don't spurn me with your heel!'

A silence ensued. After a time, Mr Carker the Manager was heard rustling among his papers, as if he had resolved to bring the interview to a conclusion. At the same time his brother withdrew nearer to the door.

'That's all,' he said. 'I watched him with such trembling and such fear, as was some little punishment to me, until he passed the place where I first fell; and then, though I had been his father, I believe I never could have thanked God more devoutly. I didn't dare to warn him, and advise him; but if I had seen direct cause, I would have shown him my example. I was afraid to be seen speaking with him, lest it should be

thought I did him harm, and tempted him to evil, and corrupted him: or lest I really should. There may be such contagion in me; I don't know. Piece out my history, in connexion with young Walter Gay, and what he has made me feel; and think of me more leniently, James, if you can.

With these words he came out to where Walter was standing. He turned a little paler when he saw him there, and paler yet when Walter caught him by the hand, and said in a whisper:

'Mr Carker, pray let me thank you! Let me say how much I feel for you! How sorry I am, to have been the unhappy cause of all this! How I almost look upon you now as my protector and guardian! How very, very much, I feel obliged to you and pity you!' said Walter, squeezing both his hands, and hardly knowing, in his agitation, what he did or said.

Mr Morfin's room being close at hand and empty, and the door wide open, they moved thither by one accord: the passage being seldom free from someone passing to or fro. When they were there, and Walter saw in Mr Carker's face some traces of the emotion within, he almost felt as if he had never seen the face before; it was so greatly changed.

'Walter,' he said, laying his hand on his shoulder. 'I am far removed from you, and may I ever be. Do you know what I am?'

'What you are!' appeared to hang on Walter's lips, as he regarded him attentively.

'It was begun,' said Carker, 'before my twenty-first birthday - led up to, long before, but not begun till near that time. I had robbed them when I came of age. I robbed them afterwards. Before my twenty-second birthday, it was all found out; and then, Walter, from all men's society, I died.'

Again his last few words hung trembling upon Walter's lips, but he could neither utter them, nor any of his own.

'The House was very good to me. May Heaven reward the old man for his forbearance! This one, too, his son, who was then newly in the Firm, where I had held great trust! I was called into that room which is now his - I have never entered it since - and came out, what you know me. For many years I sat in my present seat, alone as now, but then a known and recognised example to the rest. They were all merciful to me, and I lived. Time has altered that part of my poor expiation; and I think, except the three heads of the House, there is no one here who knows my story rightly. Before the little boy grows up, and has it told to him, my corner may be vacant. I would rather that it

might be so! This is the only change to me since that day, when I left all youth, and hope, and good men's company, behind me in that room. God bless you, Walter! Keep you, and all dear to you, in honesty, or strike them dead!

Some recollection of his trembling from head to foot, as if with excessive cold, and of his bursting into tears, was all that Walter could add to this, when he tried to recall exactly what had passed between them.

When Walter saw him next, he was bending over his desk in his old silent, drooping, humbled way. Then, observing him at his work, and feeling how resolved he evidently was that no further intercourse should arise between them, and thinking again and again on all he had seen and heard that morning in so short a time, in connexion with the history of both the Carkers, Walter could hardly believe that he was under orders for the West Indies, and would soon be lost to Uncle Sol, and Captain Cuttle, and to glimpses few and far between of Florence Dombey - no, he meant Paul - and to all he loved, and liked, and looked for, in his daily life.

But it was true, and the news had already penetrated to the outer office; for while he sat with a heavy heart, pondering on these things, and resting his head upon his arm, Perch the messenger, descending from his mahogany bracket, and jogging his elbow, begged his pardon, but wished to say in his ear, Did he think he could arrange to send home to England a jar of preserved Ginger, cheap, for Mrs Perch's own eating, in the course of her recovery from her next confinement?