

## Chapter LI - Mr Dombey And The World

What is the proud man doing, while the days go by? Does he ever think of his daughter, or wonder where she is gone? Does he suppose she has come home, and is leading her old life in the weary house? No one can answer for him. He has never uttered her name, since. His household dread him too much to approach a subject on which he is resolutely dumb; and the only person who dares question him, he silences immediately.

'My dear Paul!' murmurs his sister, sidling into the room, on the day of Florence's departure, 'your wife! that upstart woman! Is it possible that what I hear confusedly, is true, and that this is her return for your unparalleled devotion to her; extending, I am sure, even to the sacrifice of your own relations, to her caprices and haughtiness? My poor brother!'

With this speech feelingly reminiscent of her not having been asked to dinner on the day of the first party, Mrs Chick makes great use of her pocket-handkerchief, and falls on Mr Dombey's neck. But Mr Dombey frigidly lifts her off, and hands her to a chair.

'I thank you, Louisa,' he says, 'for this mark of your affection; but desire that our conversation may refer to any other subject. When I bewail my fate, Louisa, or express myself as being in want of consolation, you can offer it, if you will have the goodness.'

'My dear Paul,' rejoins his sister, with her handkerchief to her face, and shaking her head, 'I know your great spirit, and will say no more upon a theme so painful and revolting;' on the heads of which two adjectives, Mrs Chick visits scathing indignation; 'but pray let me ask you - though I dread to hear something that will shock and distress me - that unfortunate child Florence -

'Louisa!' says her brother, sternly, 'silence! Not another word of this!'

Mrs Chick can only shake her head, and use her handkerchief, and moan over degenerate Dombey's, who are no Dombey's. But whether Florence has been inculpated in the flight of Edith, or has followed her, or has done too much, or too little, or anything, or nothing, she has not the least idea.

He goes on, without deviation, keeping his thoughts and feelings close within his own breast, and imparting them to no one. He makes no search for his daughter. He may think that she is with his sister, or that she is under his own roof. He may think of her constantly, or he may never think about her. It is all one for any sign he makes.

But this is sure; he does not think that he has lost her. He has no suspicion of the truth. He has lived too long shut up in his towering supremacy, seeing her, a patient gentle creature, in the path below it, to have any fear of that. Shaken as he is by his disgrace, he is not yet humbled to the level earth. The root is broad and deep, and in the course of years its fibres have spread out and gathered nourishment from everything around it. The tree is struck, but not down.

Though he hide the world within him from the world without - which he believes has but one purpose for the time, and that, to watch him eagerly wherever he goes - he cannot hide those rebel traces of it, which escape in hollow eyes and cheeks, a haggard forehead, and a moody, brooding air. Impenetrable as before, he is still an altered man; and, proud as ever, he is humbled, or those marks would not be there.

The world. What the world thinks of him, how it looks at him, what it sees in him, and what it says - this is the haunting demon of his mind. It is everywhere where he is; and, worse than that, it is everywhere where he is not. It comes out with him among his servants, and yet he leaves it whispering behind; he sees it pointing after him in the street; it is waiting for him in his counting-house; it leers over the shoulders of rich men among the merchants; it goes beckoning and babbling among the crowd; it always anticipates him, in every place; and is always busiest, he knows, when he has gone away. When he is shut up in his room at night, it is in his house, outside it, audible in footsteps on the pavement, visible in print upon the table, steaming to and fro on railroads and in ships; restless and busy everywhere, with nothing else but him.

It is not a phantom of his imagination. It is as active in other people's minds as in his. Witness Cousin Feenix, who comes from Baden-Baden, purposely to talk to him. Witness Major Bagstock, who accompanies Cousin Feenix on that friendly mission.

Mr Dombey receives them with his usual dignity, and stands erect, in his old attitude, before the fire. He feels that the world is looking at him out of their eyes. That it is in the stare of the pictures. That Mr Pitt, upon the bookcase, represents it. That there are eyes in its own map, hanging on the wall.

'An unusually cold spring,' says Mr Dombey - to deceive the world.

'Damme, Sir,' says the Major, in the warmth of friendship, 'Joseph Bagstock is a bad hand at a counterfeit. If you want to hold your friends off, Dombey, and to give them the cold shoulder, J. B. is not the man for your purpose. Joe is rough and tough, Sir; blunt, Sir, blunt, is Joe. His Royal Highness the late Duke of York did me the

honour to say, deservedly or undeservedly - never mind that - 'If there is a man in the service on whom I can depend for coming to the point, that man is Joe - Joe Bagstock.'

Mr Dombey intimates his acquiescence.

'Now, Dombey,' says the Major, 'I am a man of the world. Our friend Feenix - if I may presume to - '

'Honoured, I am sure,' says Cousin Feenix.

' - is,' proceeds the Major, with a wag of his head, 'also a man of the world. Dombey, you are a man of the world. Now, when three men of the world meet together, and are friends - as I believe - ' again appealing to Cousin Feenix.

'I am sure,' says Cousin Feenix, 'most friendly.'

' - and are friends,' resumes the Major, 'Old Joe's opinion is (I may be wrong), that the opinion of the world on any particular subject, is very easily got at.

'Undoubtedly,' says Cousin Feenix. 'In point of fact, it's quite a self-evident sort of thing. I am extremely anxious, Major, that my friend Dombey should hear me express my very great astonishment and regret, that my lovely and accomplished relative, who was possessed of every qualification to make a man happy, should have so far forgotten what was due to - in point of fact, to the world - as to commit herself in such a very extraordinary manner. I have been in a devilish state of depression ever since; and said indeed to Long Saxby last night - man of six foot ten, with whom my friend Dombey is probably acquainted - that it had upset me in a confounded way, and made me bilious. It induces a man to reflect, this kind of fatal catastrophe,' says Cousin Feenix, 'that events do occur in quite a providential manner; for if my Aunt had been living at the time, I think the effect upon a devilish lively woman like herself, would have been prostration, and that she would have fallen, in point of fact, a victim.'

'Now, Dombey! - ' says the Major, resuming his discourse with great energy.

'I beg your pardon,' interposes Cousin Feenix. 'Allow me another word. My friend Dombey will permit me to say, that if any circumstance could have added to the most infernal state of pain in which I find myself on this occasion, it would be the natural amazement of the world at my lovely and accomplished relative (as I must still beg leave to call her) being supposed to have so committed herself with a person

- man with white teeth, in point of fact - of very inferior station to her husband. But while I must, rather peremptorily, request my friend Dombey not to criminate my lovely and accomplished relative until her criminality is perfectly established, I beg to assure my friend Dombey that the family I represent, and which is now almost extinct (devilish sad reflection for a man), will interpose no obstacle in his way, and will be happy to assent to any honourable course of proceeding, with a view to the future, that he may point out. I trust my friend Dombey will give me credit for the intentions by which I am animated in this very melancholy affair, and - a - in point of fact, I am not aware that I need trouble my friend Dombey with any further observations.'

Mr Dombey bows, without raising his eyes, and is silent.

'Now, Dombey,' says the Major, 'our friend Feenix having, with an amount of eloquence that Old Joe B. has never heard surpassed - no, by the Lord, Sir! never!' - says the Major, very blue, indeed, and grasping his cane in the middle - 'stated the case as regards the lady, I shall presume upon our friendship, Dombey, to offer a word on another aspect of it. Sir,' says the Major, with the horse's cough, 'the world in these things has opinions, which must be satisfied.'

'I know it,' rejoins Mr Dombey.

'Of course you know it, Dombey,' says the Major, 'Damme, Sir, I know you know it. A man of your calibre is not likely to be ignorant of it.'

'I hope not,' replies Mr Dombey.

'Dombey!' says the Major, 'you will guess the rest. I speak out - prematurely, perhaps - because the Bagstock breed have always spoke out. Little, Sir, have they ever got by doing it; but it's in the Bagstock blood. A shot is to be taken at this man. You have J. B. at your elbow. He claims the name of friend. God bless you!'

'Major,' returns Mr Dombey, 'I am obliged. I shall put myself in your hands when the time comes. The time not being come, I have forborne to speak to you.'

'Where is the fellow, Dombey?' inquires the Major, after gasping and looking at him, for a minute.

'I don't know.'

'Any intelligence of him?' asks the Major.

'Yes.'

'Dombey, I am rejoiced to hear it,' says the Major. 'I congratulate you.'

'You will excuse - even you, Major,' replies Mr Dombey, 'my entering into any further detail at present. The intelligence is of a singular kind, and singularly obtained. It may turn out to be valueless; it may turn out to be true; I cannot say at present. My explanation must stop here.'

Although this is but a dry reply to the Major's purple enthusiasm, the Major receives it graciously, and is delighted to think that the world has such a fair prospect of soon receiving its due. Cousin Feenix is then presented with his meed of acknowledgment by the husband of his lovely and accomplished relative, and Cousin Feenix and Major Bagstock retire, leaving that husband to the world again, and to ponder at leisure on their representation of its state of mind concerning his affairs, and on its just and reasonable expectations.

But who sits in the housekeeper's room, shedding tears, and talking to Mrs Pipchin in a low tone, with uplifted hands? It is a lady with her face concealed in a very close black bonnet, which appears not to belong to her. It is Miss Tox, who has borrowed this disguise from her servant, and comes from Princess's Place, thus secretly, to revive her old acquaintance with Mrs Pipchin, in order to get certain information of the state of Mr Dombey.

'How does he bear it, my dear creature?' asks Miss Tox.

'Well,' says Mrs Pipchin, in her snappish way, 'he's pretty much as usual.'

'Externally,' suggests Miss Tox 'But what he feels within!'

Mrs Pipchin's hard grey eye looks doubtful as she answers, in three distinct jerks, 'Ah! Perhaps. I suppose so.'

'To tell you my mind, Lucretia,' says Mrs Pipchin; she still calls Miss Tox Lucretia, on account of having made her first experiments in the child-quelling line of business on that lady, when an unfortunate and weazen little girl of tender years; 'to tell you my mind, Lucretia, I think it's a good riddance. I don't want any of your brazen faces here, myself!'

'Brazen indeed! Well may you say brazen, Mrs Pipchin!' returned Miss Tox. 'To leave him! Such a noble figure of a man!' And here Miss Tox is overcome.

'I don't know about noble, I'm sure,' observes Mrs Pipchin; irascibly rubbing her nose. 'But I know this - that when people meet with trials,

they must bear 'em. Hoity, toity! I have had enough to bear myself, in my time! What a fuss there is! She's gone, and well got rid of. Nobody wants her back, I should think!' This hint of the Peruvian Mines, causes Miss Tox to rise to go away; when Mrs Pipchin rings the bell for Towlinson to show her out, Mr Towlinson, not having seen Miss Tox for ages, grins, and hopes she's well; observing that he didn't know her at first, in that bonnet.

'Pretty well, Towlinson, I thank you,' says Miss Tox. 'I beg you'll have the goodness, when you happen to see me here, not to mention it. My visits are merely to Mrs Pipchin.'

'Very good, Miss,' says Towlinson.

'Shocking circumstances occur, Towlinson,' says Miss Tox.

'Very much so indeed, Miss,' rejoins Towlinson.

'I hope, Towlinson,' says Miss Tox, who, in her instruction of the Toodle family, has acquired an admonitorial tone, and a habit of improving passing occasions, 'that what has happened here, will be a warning to you, Towlinson.'

'Thank you, Miss, I'm sure,' says Towlinson.

He appears to be falling into a consideration of the manner in which this warning ought to operate in his particular case, when the vinegary Mrs Pipchin, suddenly stirring him up with a 'What are you doing? Why don't you show the lady to the door?' he ushers Miss Tox forth. As she passes Mr Dombey's room, she shrinks into the inmost depths of the black bonnet, and walks, on tip-toe; and there is not another atom in the world which haunts him so, that feels such sorrow and solicitude about him, as Miss Tox takes out under the black bonnet into the street, and tries to carry home shadowed it from the newly-lighted lamps

But Miss Tox is not a part of Mr Dombey's world. She comes back every evening at dusk; adding clogs and an umbrella to the bonnet on wet nights; and bears the grins of Towlinson, and the huffs and rebuffs of Mrs Pipchin, and all to ask how he does, and how he bears his misfortune: but she has nothing to do with Mr Dombey's world. Exacting and harassing as ever, it goes on without her; and she, a by no means bright or particular star, moves in her little orbit in the corner of another system, and knows it quite well, and comes, and cries, and goes away, and is satisfied. Verily Miss Tox is easier of satisfaction than the world that troubles Mr Dombey so much!

At the Counting House, the clerks discuss the great disaster in all its lights and shades, but chiefly wonder who will get Mr Carker's place. They are generally of opinion that it will be shorn of some of its emoluments, and made uncomfortable by newly-devised checks and restrictions; and those who are beyond all hope of it are quite sure they would rather not have it, and don't at all envy the person for whom it may prove to be reserved. Nothing like the prevailing sensation has existed in the Counting House since Mr Dombey's little son died; but all such excitements there take a social, not to say a jovial turn, and lead to the cultivation of good fellowship. A reconciliation is established on this propitious occasion between the acknowledged wit of the Counting House and an aspiring rival, with whom he has been at deadly feud for months; and a little dinner being proposed, in commemoration of their happily restored amity, takes place at a neighbouring tavern; the wit in the chair; the rival acting as Vice-President. The orations following the removal of the cloth are opened by the Chair, who says, Gentlemen, he can't disguise from himself that this is not a time for private dissensions. Recent occurrences to which he need not more particularly allude, but which have not been altogether without notice in some Sunday Papers,' and in a daily paper which he need not name (here every other member of the company names it in an audible murmur), have caused him to reflect; and he feels that for him and Robinson to have any personal differences at such a moment, would be for ever to deny that good feeling in the general cause, for which he has reason to think and hope that the gentlemen in Dombey's House have always been distinguished. Robinson replies to this like a man and a brother; and one gentleman who has been in the office three years, under continual notice to quit on account of lapses in his arithmetic, appears in a perfectly new light, suddenly bursting out with a thrilling speech, in which he says, May their respected chief never again know the desolation which has fallen on his hearth! and says a great variety of things, beginning with 'May he never again,' which are received with thunders of applause. In short, a most delightful evening is passed, only interrupted by a difference between two juniors, who, quarrelling about the probable amount of Mr Carker's late receipts per annum, defy each other with decanters, and are taken out greatly excited. Soda water is in general request at the office next day, and most of the party deem the bill an imposition.

As to Perch, the messenger, he is in a fair way of being ruined for life. He finds himself again constantly in bars of public-houses, being treated and lying dreadfully. It appears that he met everybody concerned in the late transaction, everywhere, and said to them, 'Sir,' or 'Madam,' as the case was, 'why do you look so pale?' at which each shuddered from head to foot, and said, 'Oh, Perch!' and ran away. Either the consciousness of these enormities, or the reaction consequent on liquor, reduces Mr Perch to an extreme state of low

spirits at that hour of the evening when he usually seeks consolation in the society of Mrs Perch at Balls Pond; and Mrs Perch frets a good deal, for she fears his confidence in woman is shaken now, and that he half expects on coming home at night to find her gone off with some Viscount - 'which,' as she observes to an intimate female friend, 'is what these wretches in the form of woman have to answer for, Mrs P. It ain't the harm they do themselves so much as what they reflect upon us, Ma'am; and I see it in Perch's eye.

Mr Dombey's servants are becoming, at the same time, quite dissipated, and unfit for other service. They have hot suppers every night, and 'talk it over' with smoking drinks upon the board. Mr Towlinson is always maudlin after half-past ten, and frequently begs to know whether he didn't say that no good would ever come of living in a corner house? They whisper about Miss Florence, and wonder where she is; but agree that if Mr Dombey don't know, Mrs Dombey does. This brings them to the latter, of whom Cook says, She had a stately way though, hadn't she? But she was too high! They all agree that she was too high, and Mr Towlinson's old flame, the housemaid (who is very virtuous), entreats that you will never talk to her any more about people who hold their heads up, as if the ground wasn't good enough for 'em.

Everything that is said and done about it, except by Mr Dombey, is done in chorus. Mr Dombey and the world are alone together.