DICKENS
CHARLES

LITTLE DORRIT

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Содержание

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PREFACE TO THE 1857 EDITION

I have been occupied with this story, during many working hours of two years. I must have been very ill employed, if I could not leave its merits and demerits as a whole, to express themselves on its being read as a whole. But, as it is not unreasonable to suppose that I may have held its threads with a more continuous attention than anyone else can have given them during its desultory publication, it is not unreasonable to ask that the weaving may be looked at in its completed state, and with the pattern finished.

If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman, without presuming to mention the unimportant fact of my having done that violence to good manners, in the days of a Russian war, and of a Court of Inquiry at Chelsea. If I might make so bold as to defend that extravagant conception, Mr Merdle, I would hint that it originated after the Railroad-share epoch, in the times of a certain Irish bank, and of one or two other equally laudable enterprises. If I were to plead anything in mitigation of the

preposterous fancy that a bad design will sometimes claim to be a good and an expressly religious design, it would be the curious coincidence that it has been brought to its climax in these pages, in the days of the public examination of late Directors of a Royal British Bank. But, I submit myself to suffer judgment to go by default on all these counts, if need be, and to accept the assurance (on good authority) that nothing like them was ever known in this land.

Some of my readers may have an interest in being informed whether or no any portions of the Marshalsea Prison are yet standing. I did not know, myself, until the sixth of this present month, when I went to look. I found the outer front courtyard, often mentioned here, metamorphosed into a butter shop; and I then almost gave up every brick of the jail for lost. Wandering, however, down a certain adjacent 'Angel Court, leading to Bermondsey', I came to 'Marshalsea Place:' the houses in which I recognised, not only as the great block of the former prison, but as preserving the rooms that arose in my mind's-eye when I became Little Dorrit's biographer. The smallest boy I ever conversed with, carrying the largest baby I ever saw, offered a supernaturally intelligent explanation of the locality in its old uses, and was very nearly correct. How this young Newton (for such I judge him to be) came by his information, I don't know; he was a quarter of a century too young to know anything about it of himself. I pointed to the window of the room where Little Dorrit was born, and where her father lived so long, and asked him

what was the name of the lodger who tenanted that apartment at present? He said, 'Tom Pythick.' I asked him who was Tom Pythick? and he said, 'Joe Pythick's uncle.'

A little further on, I found the older and smaller wall, which used to enclose the pent-up inner prison where nobody was put, except for ceremony. But, whosoever goes into Marshalsea Place, turning out of Angel Court, leading to Bermondsey, will find his feet on the very paving-stones of the extinct Marshalsea jail; will see its narrow yard to the right and to the left, very little altered if at all, except that the walls were lowered when the place got free; will look upon rooms in which the debtors lived; and will stand among the crowding ghosts of many miserable years.

In the Preface to Bleak House I remarked that I had never had so many readers. In the Preface to its next successor, Little Dorrit, I have still to repeat the same words. Deeply sensible of the affection and confidence that have grown up between us, I add to this Preface, as I added to that, May we meet again!

London May 1857

BOOK THE FIRST: POVERTY

CHAPTER 1. Sun and Shadow

Thirty years ago, Marseilles lay burning in the sun, one day.

A blazing sun upon a fierce August day was no greater rarity in southern France then, than at any other time, before or since. Everything in Marseilles, and about Marseilles, had stared at the fervid sky, and been stared at in return, until a staring habit had become universal there. Strangers were stared out of countenance by staring white houses, staring white walls, staring white streets, staring tracts of arid road, staring hills from which verdure was burnt away. The only things to be seen not fixedly staring and glaring were the vines drooping under their load of grapes. These did occasionally wink a little, as the hot air barely moved their faint leaves.

There was no wind to make a ripple on the foul water within the harbour, or on the beautiful sea without. The line of demarcation between the two colours, black and blue, showed the point which the pure sea would not pass; but it lay as quiet as the abominable pool, with which it never mixed. Boats without awnings were too hot to touch; ships blistered at their moorings; the stones of the quays had not cooled, night or day, for months. Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards,

Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genoese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendants from all the builders of Babel, come to trade at Marseilles, sought the shade alike – taking refuge in any hiding-place from a sea too intensely blue to be looked at, and a sky of purple, set with one great flaming jewel of fire.

The universal stare made the eyes ache. Towards the distant line of Italian coast, indeed, it was a little relieved by light clouds of mist, slowly rising from the evaporation of the sea, but it softened nowhere else. Far away the staring roads, deep in dust, stared from the hill-side, stared from the hollow, stared from the interminable plain. Far away the dusty vines overhanging wayside cottages, and the monotonous wayside avenues of parched trees without shade, drooped beneath the stare of earth and sky. So did the horses with drowsy bells, in long files of carts, creeping slowly towards the interior; so did their recumbent drivers, when they were awake, which rarely happened; so did the exhausted labourers in the fields. Everything that lived or grew, was oppressed by the glare; except the lizard, passing swiftly over rough stone walls, and the cicala, chirping his dry hot chirp, like a rattle. The very dust was scorched brown, and something quivered in the atmosphere as if the air itself were panting.

Blinds, shutters, curtains, awnings, were all closed and drawn to keep out the stare. Grant it but a chink or keyhole, and it shot in like a white-hot arrow. The churches were the freest from it. To come out of the twilight of pillars and arches – dreamily dotted

with winking lamps, dreamily peopled with ugly old shadows piously dozing, spitting, and begging – was to plunge into a fiery river, and swim for life to the nearest strip of shade. So, with people lounging and lying wherever shade was, with but little hum of tongues or barking of dogs, with occasional jangling of discordant church bells and rattling of vicious drums, Marseilles, a fact to be strongly smelt and tasted, lay broiling in the sun one day.

In Marseilles that day there was a villainous prison. In one of its chambers, so repulsive a place that even the obtrusive stare blinked at it, and left it to such refuse of reflected light as it could find for itself, were two men. Besides the two men, a notched and disfigured bench, immovable from the wall, with a draught-board rudely hacked upon it with a knife, a set of draughts, made of old buttons and soup bones, a set of dominoes, two mats, and two or three wine bottles. That was all the chamber held, exclusive of rats and other unseen vermin, in addition to the seen vermin, the two men.

It received such light as it got through a grating of iron bars fashioned like a pretty large window, by means of which it could be always inspected from the gloomy staircase on which the grating gave. There was a broad strong ledge of stone to this grating where the bottom of it was let into the masonry, three or four feet above the ground. Upon it, one of the two men lolled, half sitting and half lying, with his knees drawn up, and his feet and shoulders planted against the opposite sides of the aperture.

The bars were wide enough apart to admit of his thrusting his arm through to the elbow; and so he held on negligently, for his greater ease.

A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damps, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement. As the captive men were faded and haggard, so the iron was rusty, the stone was slimy, the wood was rotten, the air was faint, the light was dim. Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside, and would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact in one of the spice islands of the Indian ocean.

The man who lay on the ledge of the grating was even chilled. He jerked his great cloak more heavily upon him by an impatient movement of one shoulder, and growled, 'To the devil with this Brigand of a Sun that never shines in here!'

He was waiting to be fed, looking sideways through the bars that he might see the further down the stairs, with much of the expression of a wild beast in similar expectation. But his eyes, too close together, were not so nobly set in his head as those of the king of beasts are in his, and they were sharp rather than bright – pointed weapons with little surface to betray them. They had no depth or change; they glittered, and they opened and shut. So far, and waiving their use to himself, a clockmaker could have made a better pair. He had a hook nose, handsome after its kind, but too high between the eyes by probably just as much as his

eyes were too near to one another. For the rest, he was large and tall in frame, had thin lips, where his thick moustache showed them at all, and a quantity of dry hair, of no definable colour, in its shaggy state, but shot with red. The hand with which he held the grating (seamed all over the back with ugly scratches newly healed), was unusually small and plump; would have been unusually white but for the prison grime.

The other man was lying on the stone floor, covered with a coarse brown coat.

'Get up, pig!' growled the first. 'Don't sleep when I am hungry.'

'It's all one, master,' said the pig, in a submissive manner, and not without cheerfulness; 'I can wake when I will, I can sleep when I will. It's all the same.'

As he said it, he rose, shook himself, scratched himself, tied his brown coat loosely round his neck by the sleeves (he had previously used it as a coverlet), and sat down upon the pavement yawning, with his back against the wall opposite to the grating.

'Say what the hour is,' grumbled the first man.

'The mid-day bells will ring – in forty minutes.' When he made the little pause, he had looked round the prison-room, as if for certain information.

'You are a clock. How is it that you always know?'

'How can I say? I always know what the hour is, and where I am. I was brought in here at night, and out of a boat, but I know where I am. See here! Marseilles harbour;' on his knees on the pavement, mapping it all out with a swarthy forefinger;

‘Toulon (where the galleys are), Spain over there, Algiers over *there*. Creeping away to the left here, Nice. Round by the Cornice to Genoa. Genoa Mole and Harbour. Quarantine Ground. City there; terrace gardens blushing with the bella donna. Here, Porto Fino. Stand out for Leghorn. Out again for Civita Vecchia, so away to – hey! there’s no room for Naples;’ he had got to the wall by this time; ‘but it’s all one; it’s in there!’

He remained on his knees, looking up at his fellow-prisoner with a lively look for a prison. A sunburnt, quick, lithe, little man, though rather thickset. Earrings in his brown ears, white teeth lighting up his grotesque brown face, intensely black hair clustering about his brown throat, a ragged red shirt open at his brown breast. Loose, seaman-like trousers, decent shoes, a long red cap, a red sash round his waist, and a knife in it.

‘Judge if I come back from Naples as I went! See here, my master! Civita Vecchia, Leghorn, Porto Fino, Genoa, Cornice, Off Nice (which is in there), Marseilles, you and me. The apartment of the jailer and his keys is where I put this thumb; and here at my wrist they keep the national razor in its case – the guillotine locked up.’

The other man spat suddenly on the pavement, and gurgled in his throat.

Some lock below gurgled in *its* throat immediately afterwards, and then a door crashed. Slow steps began ascending the stairs; the prattle of a sweet little voice mingled with the noise they made; and the prison-keeper appeared carrying his daughter,

three or four years old, and a basket.

'How goes the world this forenoon, gentlemen? My little one, you see, going round with me to have a peep at her father's birds. Fie, then! Look at the birds, my pretty, look at the birds.'

He looked sharply at the birds himself, as he held the child up at the grate, especially at the little bird, whose activity he seemed to mistrust. 'I have brought your bread, Signor John Baptist,' said he (they all spoke in French, but the little man was an Italian); 'and if I might recommend you not to game – '

'You don't recommend the master!' said John Baptist, showing his teeth as he smiled.

'Oh! but the master wins,' returned the jailer, with a passing look of no particular liking at the other man, 'and you lose. It's quite another thing. You get husky bread and sour drink by it; and he gets sausage of Lyons, veal in savoury jelly, white bread, strachino cheese, and good wine by it. Look at the birds, my pretty!'

'Poor birds!' said the child.

The fair little face, touched with divine compassion, as it peeped shrinkingly through the grate, was like an angel's in the prison. John Baptist rose and moved towards it, as if it had a good attraction for him. The other bird remained as before, except for an impatient glance at the basket.

'Stay!' said the jailer, putting his little daughter on the outer ledge of the grate, 'she shall feed the birds. This big loaf is for Signor John Baptist. We must break it to get it through into the

cage. So, there's a tame bird to kiss the little hand! This sausage in a vine leaf is for Monsieur Rigaud. Again – this veal in savoury jelly is for Monsieur Rigaud. Again – these three white little loaves are for Monsieur Rigaud. Again, this cheese – again, this wine – again, this tobacco – all for Monsieur Rigaud. Lucky bird!'

The child put all these things between the bars into the soft, Smooth, well-shaped hand, with evident dread – more than once drawing back her own and looking at the man with her fair brow roughened into an expression half of fright and half of anger. Whereas she had put the lump of coarse bread into the swart, scaled, knotted hands of John Baptist (who had scarcely as much nail on his eight fingers and two thumbs as would have made out one for Monsieur Rigaud), with ready confidence; and, when he kissed her hand, had herself passed it caressingly over his face. Monsieur Rigaud, indifferent to this distinction, propitiated the father by laughing and nodding at the daughter as often as she gave him anything; and, so soon as he had all his viands about him in convenient nooks of the ledge on which he rested, began to eat with an appetite.

When Monsieur Rigaud laughed, a change took place in his face, that was more remarkable than prepossessing. His moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache, in a very sinister and cruel manner.

'There!' said the jailer, turning his basket upside down to beat the crumbs out, 'I have expended all the money I received; here is

the note of it, and *that's* a thing accomplished. Monsieur Rigaud, as I expected yesterday, the President will look for the pleasure of your society at an hour after mid-day, to-day.'

'To try me, eh?' said Rigaud, pausing, knife in hand and morsel in mouth.

'You have said it. To try you.'

'There is no news for me?' asked John Baptist, who had begun, contentedly, to munch his bread.

The jailer shrugged his shoulders.

'Lady of mine! Am I to lie here all my life, my father?'

'What do I know!' cried the jailer, turning upon him with southern quickness, and gesticulating with both his hands and all his fingers, as if he were threatening to tear him to pieces. 'My friend, how is it possible for me to tell how long you are to lie here? What do I know, John Baptist Cavalletto? Death of my life! There are prisoners here sometimes, who are not in such a devil of a hurry to be tried.'

He seemed to glance obliquely at Monsieur Rigaud in this remark; but Monsieur Rigaud had already resumed his meal, though not with quite so quick an appetite as before.

'Adieu, my birds!' said the keeper of the prison, taking his pretty child in his arms, and dictating the words with a kiss.

'Adieu, my birds!' the pretty child repeated.

Her innocent face looked back so brightly over his shoulder, as he walked away with her, singing her the song of the child's game:

> ‘Who passes by this road so late?
> Compagnon de la Majolaine!
> Who passes by this road so late?
> Always gay!’

that John Baptist felt it a point of honour to reply at the grate, and in good time and tune, though a little hoarsely:

> ‘Of all the king’s knights ‘tis the flower,
> Compagnon de la Majolaine!
> Of all the king’s knights ‘tis the flower,
> Always gay!’

Which accompanied them so far down the few steep stairs, that the prison-keeper had to stop at last for his little daughter to hear the song out, and repeat the Refrain while they were yet in sight. Then the child’s head disappeared, and the prison-keeper’s head disappeared, but the little voice prolonged the strain until the door clashed.

Monsieur Rigaud, finding the listening John Baptist in his way before the echoes had ceased (even the echoes were the weaker for imprisonment, and seemed to lag), reminded him with a push of his foot that he had better resume his own darker place. The little man sat down again upon the pavement with the negligent ease of one who was thoroughly accustomed to pavements; and placing three hunks of coarse bread before himself, and falling to

upon a fourth, began contentedly to work his way through them as if to clear them off were a sort of game.

Perhaps he glanced at the Lyons sausage, and perhaps he glanced at the veal in savoury jelly, but they were not there long, to make his mouth water; Monsieur Rigaud soon dispatched them, in spite of the president and tribunal, and proceeded to suck his fingers as clean as he could, and to wipe them on his vine leaves. Then, as he paused in his drink to contemplate his fellow-prisoner, his moustache went up, and his nose came down.

'How do you find the bread?'

'A little dry, but I have my old sauce here,' returned John Baptist, holding up his knife.

'How sauce?'

'I can cut my bread so – like a melon. Or so – like an omelette. Or so – like a fried fish. Or so – like Lyons sausage,' said John Baptist, demonstrating the various cuts on the bread he held, and soberly chewing what he had in his mouth.

'Here!' cried Monsieur Rigaud. 'You may drink. You may finish this.'

It was no great gift, for there was mighty little wine left; but Signor Cavalletto, jumping to his feet, received the bottle gratefully, turned it upside down at his mouth, and smacked his lips.

'Put the bottle by with the rest,' said Rigaud.

The little man obeyed his orders, and stood ready to give him a lighted match; for he was now rolling his tobacco into cigarettes

by the aid of little squares of paper which had been brought in with it.

'Here! You may have one.'

'A thousand thanks, my master!' John Baptist said in his own language, and with the quick conciliatory manner of his own countrymen.

Monsieur Rigaud arose, lighted a cigarette, put the rest of his stock into a breast-pocket, and stretched himself out at full length upon the bench. Cavalletto sat down on the pavement, holding one of his ankles in each hand, and smoking peacefully. There seemed to be some uncomfortable attraction of Monsieur Rigaud's eyes to the immediate neighbourhood of that part of the pavement where the thumb had been in the plan. They were so drawn in that direction, that the Italian more than once followed them to and back from the pavement in some surprise.

'What an infernal hole this is!' said Monsieur Rigaud, breaking a long pause. 'Look at the light of day. Day? the light of yesterday week, the light of six months ago, the light of six years ago. So slack and dead!'

It came languishing down a square funnel that blinded a window in the staircase wall, through which the sky was never seen – nor anything else.

'Cavalletto,' said Monsieur Rigaud, suddenly withdrawing his gaze from this funnel to which they had both involuntarily turned their eyes, 'you know me for a gentleman?'

'Surely, surely!'

‘How long have we been here?’

‘I, eleven weeks, to-morrow night at midnight. You, nine weeks and three days, at five this afternoon.’

‘Have I ever done anything here? Ever touched the broom, or spread the mats, or rolled them up, or found the draughts, or collected the dominoes, or put my hand to any kind of work?’

‘Never!’

‘Have you ever thought of looking to me to do any kind of work?’

John Baptist answered with that peculiar back-handed shake of the right forefinger which is the most expressive negative in the Italian language.

‘No! You knew from the first moment when you saw me here, that I was a gentleman?’

‘ALTRO!’ returned John Baptist, closing his eyes and giving his head a most vehement toss. The word being, according to its Genoese emphasis, a confirmation, a contradiction, an assertion, a denial, a taunt, a compliment, a joke, and fifty other things, became in the present instance, with a significance beyond all power of written expression, our familiar English ‘I believe you!’

‘Haha! You are right! A gentleman I am! And a gentleman I’ll live, and a gentleman I’ll die! It’s my intent to be a gentleman. It’s my game. Death of my soul, I play it out wherever I go!’

He changed his posture to a sitting one, crying with a triumphant air:

‘Here I am! See me! Shaken out of destiny’s dice-box into

the company of a mere smuggler; – shut up with a poor little contraband trader, whose papers are wrong, and whom the police lay hold of besides, for placing his boat (as a means of getting beyond the frontier) at the disposition of other little people whose papers are wrong; and he instinctively recognises my position, even by this light and in this place. It's well done! By Heaven! I win, however the game goes.'

Again his moustache went up, and his nose came down.

'What's the hour now?' he asked, with a dry hot pallor upon him, rather difficult of association with merriment.

'A little half-hour after mid-day.'

'Good! The President will have a gentleman before him soon. Come! Shall I tell you on what accusation? It must be now, or never, for I shall not return here. Either I shall go free, or I shall go to be made ready for shaving. You know where they keep the razor.'

Signor Cavalletto took his cigarette from between his parted lips, and showed more momentary discomfiture than might have been expected.

'I am a' – Monsieur Rigaud stood up to say it – 'I am a cosmopolitan gentleman. I own no particular country. My father was Swiss – Canton de Vaud. My mother was French by blood, English by birth. I myself was born in Belgium. I am a citizen of the world.'

His theatrical air, as he stood with one arm on his hip within the folds of his cloak, together with his manner of disregarding

his companion and addressing the opposite wall instead, seemed to intimate that he was rehearsing for the President, whose examination he was shortly to undergo, rather than troubling himself merely to enlighten so small a person as John Baptist Cavalletto.

'Call me five-and-thirty years of age. I have seen the world. I have lived here, and lived there, and lived like a gentleman everywhere. I have been treated and respected as a gentleman universally. If you try to prejudice me by making out that I have lived by my wits – how do your lawyers live – your politicians – your intriguers – your men of the Exchange?'

He kept his small smooth hand in constant requisition, as if it were a witness to his gentility that had often done him good service before.

'Two years ago I came to Marseilles. I admit that I was poor; I had been ill. When your lawyers, your politicians, your intriguers, your men of the Exchange fall ill, and have not scraped money together, *they* become poor. I put up at the Cross of Gold, – kept then by Monsieur Henri Barronneau – sixty-five at least, and in a failing state of health. I had lived in the house some four months when Monsieur Henri Barronneau had the misfortune to die; – at any rate, not a rare misfortune, that. It happens without any aid of mine, pretty often.'

John Baptist having smoked his cigarette down to his fingers' ends, Monsieur Rigaud had the magnanimity to throw him another. He lighted the second at the ashes of the first,

and smoked on, looking sideways at his companion, who, preoccupied with his own case, hardly looked at him.

'Monsieur Barronneau left a widow. She was two-and-twenty. She had gained a reputation for beauty, and (which is often another thing) was beautiful. I continued to live at the Cross of Gold. I married Madame Barronneau. It is not for me to say whether there was any great disparity in such a match. Here I stand, with the contamination of a jail upon me; but it is possible that you may think me better suited to her than her former husband was.'

He had a certain air of being a handsome man – which he was not; and a certain air of being a well-bred man – which he was not. It was mere swagger and challenge; but in this particular, as in many others, blustering assertion goes for proof, half over the world.

'Be it as it may, Madame Barronneau approved of me. *That* is not to prejudice me, I hope?'

His eye happening to light upon John Baptist with this inquiry, that little man briskly shook his head in the negative, and repeated in an argumentative tone under his breath, altro, altro, altro, altro – an infinite number of times.

'Now came the difficulties of our position. I am proud. I say nothing in defence of pride, but I am proud. It is also my character to govern. I can't submit; I must govern. Unfortunately, the property of Madame Rigaud was settled upon herself. Such was the insane act of her late husband. More unfortunately

still, she had relations. When a wife's relations interpose against a husband who is a gentleman, who is proud, and who must govern, the consequences are inimical to peace. There was yet another source of difference between us. Madame Rigaud was unfortunately a little vulgar. I sought to improve her manners and ameliorate her general tone; she (supported in this likewise by her relations) resented my endeavours. Quarrels began to arise between us; and, propagated and exaggerated by the slanders of the relations of Madame Rigaud, to become notorious to the neighbours. It has been said that I treated Madame Rigaud with cruelty. I may have been seen to slap her face – nothing more. I have a light hand; and if I have been seen apparently to correct Madame Rigaud in that manner, I have done it almost playfully.'

If the playfulness of Monsieur Rigaud were at all expressed by his smile at this point, the relations of Madame Rigaud might have said that they would have much preferred his correcting that unfortunate woman seriously.

'I am sensitive and brave. I do not advance it as a merit to be sensitive and brave, but it is my character. If the male relations of Madame Rigaud had put themselves forward openly, I should have known how to deal with them. They knew that, and their machinations were conducted in secret; consequently, Madame Rigaud and I were brought into frequent and unfortunate collision. Even when I wanted any little sum of money for my personal expenses, I could not obtain it without collision – and I, too, a man whose character it is to govern! One night,

Madame Rigaud and myself were walking amicably – I may say like lovers – on a height overhanging the sea. An evil star occasioned Madame Rigaud to advert to her relations; I reasoned with her on that subject, and remonstrated on the want of duty and devotion manifested in her allowing herself to be influenced by their jealous animosity towards her husband. Madame Rigaud retorted; I retorted; Madame Rigaud grew warm; I grew warm, and provoked her. I admit it. Frankness is a part of my character. At length, Madame Rigaud, in an access of fury that I must ever deplore, threw herself upon me with screams of passion (no doubt those that were overheard at some distance), tore my clothes, tore my hair, lacerated my hands, trampled and trod the dust, and finally leaped over, dashing herself to death upon the rocks below. Such is the train of incidents which malice has perverted into my endeavouring to force from Madame Rigaud a relinquishment of her rights; and, on her persistence in a refusal to make the concession I required, struggling with her – assassinating her!'

He stepped aside to the ledge where the vine leaves yet lay strewn about, collected two or three, and stood wiping his hands upon them, with his back to the light.

'Well,' he demanded after a silence, 'have you nothing to say to all that?'

'It's ugly,' returned the little man, who had risen, and was brightening his knife upon his shoe, as he leaned an arm against the wall.

‘What do you mean?’

John Baptist polished his knife in silence.

‘Do you mean that I have not represented the case correctly?’

‘Al-tro!’ returned John Baptist. The word was an apology now, and stood for ‘Oh, by no means!’

‘What then?’

‘Presidents and tribunals are so prejudiced.’

‘Well,’ cried the other, uneasily flinging the end of his cloak over his shoulder with an oath, ‘let them do their worst!’

‘Truly I think they will,’ murmured John Baptist to himself, as he bent his head to put his knife in his sash.

Nothing more was said on either side, though they both began walking to and fro, and necessarily crossed at every turn. Monsieur Rigaud sometimes stopped, as if he were going to put his case in a new light, or make some irate remonstrance; but Signor Cavalletto continuing to go slowly to and fro at a grotesque kind of jog-trot pace with his eyes turned downward, nothing came of these inclinings.

By-and-by the noise of the key in the lock arrested them both. The sound of voices succeeded, and the tread of feet. The door clashed, the voices and the feet came on, and the prison-keeper slowly ascended the stairs, followed by a guard of soldiers.

‘Now, Monsieur Rigaud,’ said he, pausing for a moment at the grate, with his keys in his hands, ‘have the goodness to come out.’

‘I am to depart in state, I see?’

‘Why, unless you did,’ returned the jailer, ‘you might depart in

so many pieces that it would be difficult to get you together again. There's a crowd, Monsieur Rigaud, and it doesn't love you.'

He passed on out of sight, and unlocked and unbarred a low door in the corner of the chamber. 'Now,' said he, as he opened it and appeared within, 'come out.'

There is no sort of whiteness in all the hues under the sun at all like the whiteness of Monsieur Rigaud's face as it was then. Neither is there any expression of the human countenance at all like that expression in every little line of which the frightened heart is seen to beat. Both are conventionally compared with death; but the difference is the whole deep gulf between the struggle done, and the fight at its most desperate extremity.

He lighted another of his paper cigars at his companion's; put it tightly between his teeth; covered his head with a soft slouched hat; threw the end of his cloak over his shoulder again; and walked out into the side gallery on which the door opened, without taking any further notice of Signor Cavalletto. As to that little man himself, his whole attention had become absorbed in getting near the door and looking out at it. Precisely as a beast might approach the opened gate of his den and eye the freedom beyond, he passed those few moments in watching and peering, until the door was closed upon him.

There was an officer in command of the soldiers; a stout, serviceable, profoundly calm man, with his drawn sword in his hand, smoking a cigar. He very briefly directed the placing of Monsieur Rigaud in the midst of the party, put himself with

consummate indifference at their head, gave the word 'march!' and so they all went jingling down the staircase. The door clashed – the key turned – and a ray of unusual light, and a breath of unusual air, seemed to have passed through the jail, vanishing in a tiny wreath of smoke from the cigar.

Still, in his captivity, like a lower animal – like some impatient ape, or roused bear of the smaller species – the prisoner, now left solitary, had jumped upon the ledge, to lose no glimpse of this departure. As he yet stood clasping the grate with both hands, an uproar broke upon his hearing; yells, shrieks, oaths, threats, execrations, all comprehended in it, though (as in a storm) nothing but a raging swell of sound distinctly heard.

Excited into a still greater resemblance to a caged wild animal by his anxiety to know more, the prisoner leaped nimbly down, ran round the chamber, leaped nimbly up again, clasped the grate and tried to shake it, leaped down and ran, leaped up and listened, and never rested until the noise, becoming more and more distant, had died away. How many better prisoners have worn their noble hearts out so; no man thinking of it; not even the beloved of their souls realising it; great kings and governors, who had made them captive, careering in the sunlight jauntily, and men cheering them on. Even the said great personages dying in bed, making exemplary ends and sounding speeches; and polite history, more servile than their instruments, embalming them!

At last, John Baptist, now able to choose his own spot within the compass of those walls for the exercise of his faculty of

going to sleep when he would, lay down upon the bench, with his face turned over on his crossed arms, and slumbered. In his submission, in his lightness, in his good humour, in his short-lived passion, in his easy contentment with hard bread and hard stones, in his ready sleep, in his fits and starts, altogether a true son of the land that gave him birth.

The wide stare stared itself out for one while; the Sun went down in a red, green, golden glory; the stars came out in the heavens, and the fire-flies mimicked them in the lower air, as men may feebly imitate the goodness of a better order of beings; the long dusty roads and the interminable plains were in repose – and so deep a hush was on the sea, that it scarcely whispered of the time when it shall give up its dead.

CHAPTER 2 Fellow Travellers

No more of yesterday's howling over yonder to-day, Sir; is there?'

'I have heard none.'

'Then you may be sure there *is* none. When these people howl, they howl to be heard.'

'Most people do, I suppose.'

'Ah! but these people are always howling. Never happy otherwise.'

'Do you mean the Marseilles people?'

'I mean the French people. They're always at it. As to Marseilles, we know what Marseilles is. It sent the most insurrectionary tune into the world that was ever composed. It couldn't exist without allonging and marshonging to something or other – victory or death, or blazes, or something.'

The speaker, with a whimsical good humour upon him all the time, looked over the parapet-wall with the greatest disparagement of Marseilles; and taking up a determined position by putting his hands in his pockets and rattling his money at it, apostrophised it with a short laugh.

'Allong and marshong, indeed. It would be more creditable to you, I think, to let other people allong and marshong about their lawful business, instead of shutting 'em up in quarantine!'

'Tiresome enough,' said the other. 'But we shall be out to-day.'

‘Out to-day!’ repeated the first. ‘It’s almost an aggravation of the enormity, that we shall be out to-day. Out! What have we ever been in for?’

‘For no very strong reason, I must say. But as we come from the East, and as the East is the country of the plague – ’

‘The plague!’ repeated the other. ‘That’s my grievance. I have had the plague continually, ever since I have been here. I am like a sane man shut up in a madhouse; I can’t stand the suspicion of the thing. I came here as well as ever I was in my life; but to suspect me of the plague is to give me the plague. And I have had it – and I have got it.’

‘You bear it very well, Mr Meagles,’ said the second speaker, smiling.

‘No. If you knew the real state of the case, that’s the last observation you would think of making. I have been waking up night after night, and saying, *now* I have got it, *now* it has developed itself, *now* I am in for it, *now* these fellows are making out their case for their precautions. Why, I’d as soon have a spit put through me, and be stuck upon a card in a collection of beetles, as lead the life I have been leading here.’

‘Well, Mr Meagles, say no more about it now it’s over,’ urged a cheerful feminine voice.

‘Over!’ repeated Mr Meagles, who appeared (though without any ill-nature) to be in that peculiar state of mind in which the last word spoken by anybody else is a new injury. ‘Over! and why should I say no more about it because it’s over?’

It was Mrs Meagles who had spoken to Mr Meagles; and Mrs Meagles was, like Mr Meagles, comely and healthy, with a pleasant English face which had been looking at homely things for five-and-fifty years or more, and shone with a bright reflection of them.

'There! Never mind, Father, never mind!' said Mrs Meagles. 'For goodness sake content yourself with Pet.'

'With Pet?' repeated Mr Meagles in his injured vein. Pet, however, being close behind him, touched him on the shoulder, and Mr Meagles immediately forgave Marseilles from the bottom of his heart.

Pet was about twenty. A fair girl with rich brown hair hanging free in natural ringlets. A lovely girl, with a frank face, and wonderful eyes; so large, so soft, so bright, set to such perfection in her kind good head. She was round and fresh and dimpled and spoilt, and there was in Pet an air of timidity and dependence which was the best weakness in the world, and gave her the only crowning charm a girl so pretty and pleasant could have been without.

'Now, I ask you,' said Mr Meagles in the blandest confidence, falling back a step himself, and handing his daughter a step forward to illustrate his question: 'I ask you simply, as between man and man, you know, DID you ever hear of such damned nonsense as putting Pet in quarantine?'

'It has had the result of making even quarantine enjoyable.'

'Come!' said Mr Meagles, 'that's something to be sure. I am

obliged to you for that remark. Now, Pet, my darling, you had better go along with Mother and get ready for the boat. The officer of health, and a variety of humbugs in cocked hats, are coming off to let us out of this at last: and all we jail-birds are to breakfast together in something approaching to a Christian style again, before we take wing for our different destinations. Tattycoram, stick you close to your young mistress.'

He spoke to a handsome girl with lustrous dark hair and eyes, and very neatly dressed, who replied with a half curtsey as she passed off in the train of Mrs Meagles and Pet. They crossed the bare scorched terrace all three together, and disappeared through a staring white archway. Mr Meagles's companion, a grave dark man of forty, still stood looking towards this archway after they were gone; until Mr Meagles tapped him on the arm.

'I beg your pardon,' said he, starting.

'Not at all,' said Mr Meagles.

They took one silent turn backward and forward in the shade of the wall, getting, at the height on which the quarantine barracks are placed, what cool refreshment of sea breeze there was at seven in the morning. Mr Meagles's companion resumed the conversation.

'May I ask you,' he said, 'what is the name of – '

'Tattycoram?' Mr Meagles struck in. 'I have not the least idea.'

'I thought,' said the other, 'that – '

'Tattycoram?' suggested Mr Meagles again.

'Thank you – that Tattycoram was a name; and I have several

times wondered at the oddity of it.'

'Why, the fact is,' said Mr Meagles, 'Mrs Meagles and myself are, you see, practical people.'

'That you have frequently mentioned in the course of the agreeable and interesting conversations we have had together, walking up and down on these stones,' said the other, with a half smile breaking through the gravity of his dark face.

'Practical people. So one day, five or six years ago now, when we took Pet to church at the Foundling – you have heard of the Foundling Hospital in London? Similar to the Institution for the Found Children in Paris?'

'I have seen it.'

'Well! One day when we took Pet to church there to hear the music – because, as practical people, it is the business of our lives to show her everything that we think can please her – Mother (my usual name for Mrs Meagles) began to cry so, that it was necessary to take her out. "What's the matter, Mother?" said I, when we had brought her a little round: "you are frightening Pet, my dear." "Yes, I know that, Father," says Mother, "but I think it's through my loving her so much, that it ever came into my head." "That ever what came into your head, Mother?" "O dear, dear!" cried Mother, breaking out again, "when I saw all those children ranged tier above tier, and appealing from the father none of them has ever known on earth, to the great Father of us all in Heaven, I thought, does any wretched mother ever come here, and look among those young faces, wondering which is the

poor child she brought into this forlorn world, never through all its life to know her love, her kiss, her face, her voice, even her name!" Now that was practical in Mother, and I told her so. I said, "Mother, that's what I call practical in you, my dear."'

The other, not unmoved, assented.

'So I said next day: Now, Mother, I have a proposition to make that I think you'll approve of. Let us take one of those same little children to be a little maid to Pet. We are practical people. So if we should find her temper a little defective, or any of her ways a little wide of ours, we shall know what we have to take into account. We shall know what an immense deduction must be made from all the influences and experiences that have formed us – no parents, no child-brother or sister, no individuality of home, no Glass Slipper, or Fairy Godmother. And that's the way we came by Tattycoram.'

'And the name itself – '

'By George!' said Mr Meagles, 'I was forgetting the name itself. Why, she was called in the Institution, Harriet Beadle – an arbitrary name, of course. Now, Harriet we changed into Hattey, and then into Tatty, because, as practical people, we thought even a playful name might be a new thing to her, and might have a softening and affectionate kind of effect, don't you see? As to Beadle, that I needn't say was wholly out of the question. If there is anything that is not to be tolerated on any terms, anything that is a type of Jack-in-office insolence and absurdity, anything that represents in coats, waistcoats, and big sticks our English holding

on by nonsense after every one has found it out, it is a beadle. You haven't seen a beadle lately?'

'As an Englishman who has been more than twenty years in China, no.'

'Then,' said Mr Meagles, laying his forefinger on his companion's breast with great animation, 'don't you see a beadle, now, if you can help it. Whenever I see a beadle in full fig, coming down a street on a Sunday at the head of a charity school, I am obliged to turn and run away, or I should hit him. The name of Beadle being out of the question, and the originator of the Institution for these poor foundlings having been a blessed creature of the name of Coram, we gave that name to Pet's little maid. At one time she was Tatty, and at one time she was Coram, until we got into a way of mixing the two names together, and now she is always Tattycoram.'

'Your daughter,' said the other, when they had taken another silent turn to and fro, and, after standing for a moment at the wall glancing down at the sea, had resumed their walk, 'is your only child, I know, Mr Meagles. May I ask you – in no impertinent curiosity, but because I have had so much pleasure in your society, may never in this labyrinth of a world exchange a quiet word with you again, and wish to preserve an accurate remembrance of you and yours – may I ask you, if I have not gathered from your good wife that you have had other children?'

'No. No,' said Mr Meagles. 'Not exactly other children. One other child.'

‘I am afraid I have inadvertently touched upon a tender theme.’

‘Never mind,’ said Mr Meagles. ‘If I am grave about it, I am not at all sorrowful. It quiets me for a moment, but does not make me unhappy. Pet had a twin sister who died when we could just see her eyes – exactly like Pet’s – above the table, as she stood on tiptoe holding by it.’

‘Ah! indeed, indeed!’

‘Yes, and being practical people, a result has gradually sprung up in the minds of Mrs Meagles and myself which perhaps you may – or perhaps you may not – understand. Pet and her baby sister were so exactly alike, and so completely one, that in our thoughts we have never been able to separate them since. It would be of no use to tell us that our dead child was a mere infant. We have changed that child according to the changes in the child spared to us and always with us. As Pet has grown, that child has grown; as Pet has become more sensible and womanly, her sister has become more sensible and womanly by just the same degrees. It would be as hard to convince me that if I was to pass into the other world to-morrow, I should not, through the mercy of God, be received there by a daughter, just like Pet, as to persuade me that Pet herself is not a reality at my side.’

‘I understand you,’ said the other, gently.

‘As to her,’ pursued her father, ‘the sudden loss of her little picture and playfellow, and her early association with that mystery in which we all have our equal share, but which is not often so forcibly presented to a child, has necessarily had some

influence on her character. Then, her mother and I were not young when we married, and Pet has always had a sort of grown-up life with us, though we have tried to adapt ourselves to her. We have been advised more than once when she has been a little ailing, to change climate and air for her as often as we could – especially at about this time of her life – and to keep her amused. So, as I have no need to stick at a bank-desk now (though I have been poor enough in my time I assure you, or I should have married Mrs Meagles long before), we go trotting about the world. This is how you found us staring at the Nile, and the Pyramids, and the Sphinxes, and the Desert, and all the rest of it; and this is how Tattycoram will be a greater traveller in course of time than Captain Cook.'

'I thank you,' said the other, 'very heartily for your confidence.'

'Don't mention it,' returned Mr Meagles, 'I am sure you are quite welcome. And now, Mr Clennam, perhaps I may ask you whether you have yet come to a decision where to go next?'

'Indeed, no. I am such a waif and stray everywhere, that I am liable to be drifted where any current may set.'

'It's extraordinary to me – if you'll excuse my freedom in saying so – that you don't go straight to London,' said Mr Meagles, in the tone of a confidential adviser.

'Perhaps I shall.'

'Ay! But I mean with a will.'

'I have no will. That is to say,' – he coloured a little, – 'next

to none that I can put in action now. Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.'

'Light 'em up again!' said Mr Meagles.

'Ah! Easily said. I am the son, Mr Meagles, of a hard father and mother. I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything; for whom what could not be weighed, measured, and priced, had no existence. Strict people as the phrase is, professors of a stern religion, their very religion was a gloomy sacrifice of tastes and sympathies that were never their own, offered up as a part of a bargain for the security of their possessions. Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance in this world and terror in the next – nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere – this was my childhood, if I may so misuse the word as to apply it to such a beginning of life.'

'Really though?' said Mr Meagles, made very uncomfortable by the picture offered to his imagination. 'That was a tough commencement. But come! You must now study, and profit by, all that lies beyond it, like a practical man.'

'If the people who are usually called practical, were practical

in your direction – ’

‘Why, so they are!’ said Mr Meagles.

‘Are they indeed?’

‘Well, I suppose so,’ returned Mr Meagles, thinking about it. ‘Eh? One can but *be* practical, and Mrs Meagles and myself are nothing else.’

‘My unknown course is easier and more helpful than I had expected to find it, then,’ said Clennam, shaking his head with his grave smile. ‘Enough of me. Here is the boat.’

The boat was filled with the cocked hats to which Mr Meagles entertained a national objection; and the wearers of those cocked hats landed and came up the steps, and all the impounded travellers congregated together. There was then a mighty production of papers on the part of the cocked hats, and a calling over of names, and great work of signing, sealing, stamping, inking, and sanding, with exceedingly blurred, gritty, and undecipherable results. Finally, everything was done according to rule, and the travellers were at liberty to depart whithersoever they would.

They made little account of stare and glare, in the new pleasure of recovering their freedom, but flitted across the harbour in gay boats, and reassembled at a great hotel, whence the sun was excluded by closed lattices, and where bare paved floors, lofty ceilings, and resounding corridors tempered the intense heat. There, a great table in a great room was soon profusely covered with a superb repast; and the quarantine

quarters became bare indeed, remembered among dainty dishes, southern fruits, cooled wines, flowers from Genoa, snow from the mountain tops, and all the colours of the rainbow flashing in the mirrors.

'But I bear those monotonous walls no ill-will now,' said Mr Meagles. 'One always begins to forgive a place as soon as it's left behind; I dare say a prisoner begins to relent towards his prison, after he is let out.'

They were about thirty in company, and all talking; but necessarily in groups. Father and Mother Meagles sat with their daughter between them, the last three on one side of the table: on the opposite side sat Mr Clennam; a tall French gentleman with raven hair and beard, of a swart and terrible, not to say genteelly diabolical aspect, but who had shown himself the mildest of men; and a handsome young Englishwoman, travelling quite alone, who had a proud observant face, and had either withdrawn herself from the rest or been avoided by the rest – nobody, herself excepted perhaps, could have quite decided which. The rest of the party were of the usual materials: travellers on business, and travellers for pleasure; officers from India on leave; merchants in the Greek and Turkey trades; a clerical English husband in a meek strait-waistcoat, on a wedding trip with his young wife; a majestic English mama and papa, of the patrician order, with a family of three growing-up daughters, who were keeping a journal for the confusion of their fellow-creatures; and a deaf old English mother, tough in travel, with a very decidedly grown-

up daughter indeed, which daughter went sketching about the universe in the expectation of ultimately toning herself off into the married state.

The reserved Englishwoman took up Mr Meagles in his last remark.

'Do you mean that a prisoner forgives his prison?' said she, slowly and with emphasis.

'That was my speculation, Miss Wade. I don't pretend to know positively how a prisoner might feel. I never was one before.'

'Mademoiselle doubts,' said the French gentleman in his own language, 'it's being so easy to forgive?'

'I do.'

Pet had to translate this passage to Mr Meagles, who never by any accident acquired any knowledge whatever of the language of any country into which he travelled. 'Oh!' said he. 'Dear me! But that's a pity, isn't it?'

'That I am not credulous?' said Miss Wade.

'Not exactly that. Put it another way. That you can't believe it easy to forgive.'

'My experience,' she quietly returned, 'has been correcting my belief in many respects, for some years. It is our natural progress, I have heard.'

'Well, well! But it's not natural to bear malice, I hope?' said Mr Meagles, cheerily.

'If I had been shut up in any place to pine and suffer, I should always hate that place and wish to burn it down, or raze it to the

ground. I know no more.'

'Strong, sir?' said Mr Meagles to the Frenchman; it being another of his habits to address individuals of all nations in idiomatic English, with a perfect conviction that they were bound to understand it somehow. 'Rather forcible in our fair friend, you'll agree with me, I think?'

The French gentleman courteously replied, 'Plait-il?' To which Mr Meagles returned with much satisfaction, 'You are right. My opinion.'

The breakfast beginning by-and-by to languish, Mr Meagles made the company a speech. It was short enough and sensible enough, considering that it was a speech at all, and hearty. It merely went to the effect that as they had all been thrown together by chance, and had all preserved a good understanding together, and were now about to disperse, and were not likely ever to find themselves all together again, what could they do better than bid farewell to one another, and give one another good-speed in a simultaneous glass of cool champagne all round the table? It was done, and with a general shaking of hands the assembly broke up for ever.

The solitary young lady all this time had said no more. She rose with the rest, and silently withdrew to a remote corner of the great room, where she sat herself on a couch in a window, seeming to watch the reflection of the water as it made a silver quivering on the bars of the lattice. She sat, turned away from the whole length of the apartment, as if she were lonely of her own

haughty choice. And yet it would have been as difficult as ever to say, positively, whether she avoided the rest, or was avoided.

The shadow in which she sat, falling like a gloomy veil across her forehead, accorded very well with the character of her beauty. One could hardly see the face, so still and scornful, set off by the arched dark eyebrows, and the folds of dark hair, without wondering what its expression would be if a change came over it. That it could soften or relent, appeared next to impossible. That it could deepen into anger or any extreme of defiance, and that it must change in that direction when it changed at all, would have been its peculiar impression upon most observers. It was dressed and trimmed into no ceremony of expression. Although not an open face, there was no pretence in it. 'I am self-contained and self-reliant; your opinion is nothing to me; I have no interest in you, care nothing for you, and see and hear you with indifference' – this it said plainly. It said so in the proud eyes, in the lifted nostril, in the handsome but compressed and even cruel mouth. Cover either two of those channels of expression, and the third would have said so still. Mask them all, and the mere turn of the head would have shown an unsubduable nature.

Pet had moved up to her (she had been the subject of remark among her family and Mr Clennam, who were now the only other occupants of the room), and was standing at her side.

'Are you' – she turned her eyes, and Pet faltered – 'expecting any one to meet you here, Miss Wade?'

'I? No.'

‘Father is sending to the Poste Restante. Shall he have the pleasure of directing the messenger to ask if there are any letters for you?’

‘I thank him, but I know there can be none.’

‘We are afraid,’ said Pet, sitting down beside her, shyly and half tenderly, ‘that you will feel quite deserted when we are all gone.’

‘Indeed!’

‘Not,’ said Pet, apologetically and embarrassed by her eyes, ‘not, of course, that we are any company to you, or that we have been able to be so, or that we thought you wished it.’

‘I have not intended to make it understood that I did wish it.’

‘No. Of course. But – in short,’ said Pet, timidly touching her hand as it lay impassive on the sofa between them, ‘will you not allow Father to tender you any slight assistance or service? He will be very glad.’

‘Very glad,’ said Mr Meagles, coming forward with his wife and Clennam. ‘Anything short of speaking the language, I shall be delighted to undertake, I am sure.’

‘I am obliged to you,’ she returned, ‘but my arrangements are made, and I prefer to go my own way in my own manner.’

‘*Do* you?’ said Mr Meagles to himself, as he surveyed her with a puzzled look. ‘Well! There’s character in that, too.’

‘I am not much used to the society of young ladies, and I am afraid I may not show my appreciation of it as others might. A pleasant journey to you. Good-bye!’

She would not have put out her hand, it seemed, but that Mr Meagles put out his so straight before her that she could not pass it. She put hers in it, and it lay there just as it had lain upon the couch.

'Good-bye!' said Mr Meagles. 'This is the last good-bye upon the list, for Mother and I have just said it to Mr Clennam here, and he only waits to say it to Pet. Good-bye! We may never meet again.'

'In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet *us*, from many strange places and by many strange roads,' was the composed reply; 'and what it is set to us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done.'

There was something in the manner of these words that jarred upon Pet's ear. It implied that what was to be done was necessarily evil, and it caused her to say in a whisper, 'O Father!' and to shrink childishly, in her spoilt way, a little closer to him. This was not lost on the speaker.

'Your pretty daughter,' she said, 'starts to think of such things. Yet,' looking full upon her, 'you may be sure that there are men and women already on their road, who have their business to do with *you*, and who will do it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be coming hundreds, thousands, of miles over the sea there; they may be close at hand now; they may be coming, for anything you know or anything you can do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this very town.'

With the coldest of farewells, and with a certain worn

expression on her beauty that gave it, though scarcely yet in its prime, a wasted look, she left the room.

Now, there were many stairs and passages that she had to traverse in passing from that part of the spacious house to the chamber she had secured for her own occupation. When she had almost completed the journey, and was passing along the gallery in which her room was, she heard an angry sound of muttering and sobbing. A door stood open, and within she saw the attendant upon the girl she had just left; the maid with the curious name.

She stood still, to look at this maid. A sullen, passionate girl! Her rich black hair was all about her face, her face was flushed and hot, and as she sobbed and raged, she plucked at her lips with an unsparing hand.

'Selfish brutes!' said the girl, sobbing and heaving between whiles. 'Not caring what becomes of me! Leaving me here hungry and thirsty and tired, to starve, for anything they care! Beasts! Devils! Wretches!'

'My poor girl, what is the matter?'

She looked up suddenly, with reddened eyes, and with her hands suspended, in the act of pinching her neck, freshly disfigured with great scarlet blots. 'It's nothing to you what's the matter. It don't signify to any one.'

'O yes it does; I am sorry to see you so.'

'You are not sorry,' said the girl. 'You are glad. You know you are glad. I never was like this but twice over in the quarantine yonder; and both times you found me. I am afraid of you.'

‘Afraid of me?’

‘Yes. You seem to come like my own anger, my own malice, my own – whatever it is – I don’t know what it is. But I am ill-used, I am ill-used, I am ill-used!’ Here the sobs and the tears, and the tearing hand, which had all been suspended together since the first surprise, went on together anew.

The visitor stood looking at her with a strange attentive smile. It was wonderful to see the fury of the contest in the girl, and the bodily struggle she made as if she were rent by the Demons of old.

‘I am younger than she is by two or three years, and yet it’s me that looks after her, as if I was old, and it’s she that’s always petted and called Baby! I detest the name. I hate her! They make a fool of her, they spoil her. She thinks of nothing but herself, she thinks no more of me than if I was a stock and a stone!’ So the girl went on.

‘You must have patience.’

‘I *won’t* have patience!’

‘If they take much care of themselves, and little or none of you, you must not mind it.’

I *will* mind it.’

‘Hush! Be more prudent. You forget your dependent position.’

‘I don’t care for that. I’ll run away. I’ll do some mischief. I won’t bear it; I can’t bear it; I shall die if I try to bear it!’

The observer stood with her hand upon her own bosom, looking at the girl, as one afflicted with a diseased part might

curiously watch the dissection and exposition of an analogous case.

The girl raged and battled with all the force of her youth and fulness of life, until by little and little her passionate exclamations trailed off into broken murmurs as if she were in pain. By corresponding degrees she sank into a chair, then upon her knees, then upon the ground beside the bed, drawing the coverlet with her, half to hide her shamed head and wet hair in it, and half, as it seemed, to embrace it, rather than have nothing to take to her repentant breast.

'Go away from me, go away from me! When my temper comes upon me, I am mad. I know I might keep it off if I only tried hard enough, and sometimes I do try hard enough, and at other times I don't and won't. What have I said! I knew when I said it, it was all lies. They think I am being taken care of somewhere, and have all I want. They are nothing but good to me. I love them dearly; no people could ever be kinder to a thankless creature than they always are to me. Do, do go away, for I am afraid of you. I am afraid of myself when I feel my temper coming, and I am as much afraid of you. Go away from me, and let me pray and cry myself better!'

The day passed on; and again the wide stare stared itself out; and the hot night was on Marseilles; and through it the caravan of the morning, all dispersed, went their appointed ways. And thus ever by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by

land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life.

CHAPTER 3. Home

It was a Sunday evening in London, gloomy, close, and stale. Maddening church bells of all degrees of dissonance, sharp and flat, cracked and clear, fast and slow, made the brick-and-mortar echoes hideous. Melancholy streets, in a penitential garb of soot, steeped the souls of the people who were condemned to look at them out of windows, in dire despondency. In every thoroughfare, up almost every alley, and down almost every turning, some doleful bell was throbbing, jerking, tolling, as if the Plague were in the city and the dead-carts were going round. Everything was bolted and barred that could by possibility furnish relief to an overworked people. No pictures, no unfamiliar animals, no rare plants or flowers, no natural or artificial wonders of the ancient world – all *taboo* with that enlightened strictness, that the ugly South Sea gods in the British Museum might have supposed themselves at home again. Nothing to see but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to breathe but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to change the brooding mind, or raise it up. Nothing for the spent toiler to do, but to compare the monotony of his seventh day with the monotony of his six days, think what a weary life he led, and make the best of it – or the worst, according to the probabilities.

At such a happy time, so propitious to the interests of religion and morality, Mr Arthur Clennam, newly arrived from

Marseilles by way of Dover, and by Dover coach the Blue-eyed Maid, sat in the window of a coffee-house on Ludgate Hill. Ten thousand responsible houses surrounded him, frowning as heavily on the streets they composed, as if they were every one inhabited by the ten young men of the Calender's story, who blackened their faces and bemoaned their miseries every night. Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him where people lived so unwholesomely that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning; albeit my lord, their county member, was amazed that they failed to sleep in company with their butcher's meat. Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away towards every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river. What secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labour, six days in the week, lay among these Arcadian objects, from the sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave – what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day? Clearly they could want nothing but a stringent policeman.

Mr Arthur Clennam sat in the window of the coffee-house on Ludgate Hill, counting one of the neighbouring bells, making sentences and burdens of songs out of it in spite of himself, and wondering how many sick people it might be the death of in the course of the year. As the hour approached, its changes of measure made it more and more exasperating. At the quarter,

it went off into a condition of deadly-lively importunity, urging the populace in a voluble manner to Come to church, Come to church, Come to church! At the ten minutes, it became aware that the congregation would be scanty, and slowly hammered out in low spirits, They *won't* come, they *won't* come, they *won't* come! At the five minutes, it abandoned hope, and shook every house in the neighbourhood for three hundred seconds, with one dismal swing per second, as a groan of despair.

'Thank Heaven!' said Clennam, when the hour struck, and the bell stopped.

But its sound had revived a long train of miserable Sundays, and the procession would not stop with the bell, but continued to march on. 'Heaven forgive me,' said he, 'and those who trained me. How I have hated this day!'

There was the dreary Sunday of his childhood, when he sat with his hands before him, scared out of his senses by a horrible tract which commenced business with the poor child by asking him in its title, why he was going to Perdition? – a piece of curiosity that he really, in a frock and drawers, was not in a condition to satisfy – and which, for the further attraction of his infant mind, had a parenthesis in every other line with some such hiccupping reference as 2 Ep. Thess. c. iii, v. 6 & 7. There was the sleepy Sunday of his boyhood, when, like a military deserter, he was marched to chapel by a picquet of teachers three times a day, morally handcuffed to another boy; and when he would willingly have bartered two meals of indigestible sermon for another ounce

or two of inferior mutton at his scanty dinner in the flesh. There was the interminable Sunday of his nonage; when his mother, stern of face and unrelenting of heart, would sit all day behind a Bible – bound, like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest, and straitest boards, with one dinted ornament on the cover like the drag of a chain, and a wrathful sprinkling of red upon the edges of the leaves – as if it, of all books! were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection, and gentle intercourse. There was the resentful Sunday of a little later, when he sat down glowering and glooming through the tardy length of the day, with a sullen sense of injury in his heart, and no more real knowledge of the beneficent history of the New Testament than if he had been bred among idolaters. There was a legion of Sundays, all days of unserviceable bitterness and mortification, slowly passing before him.

'Beg pardon, sir,' said a brisk waiter, rubbing the table. 'Wish see bed-room?'

'Yes. I have just made up my mind to do it.'

'Chaymaid!' cried the waiter. 'Gelen box num seven wish see room!'

'Stay!' said Clennam, rousing himself. 'I was not thinking of what I said; I answered mechanically. I am not going to sleep here. I am going home.'

'Deed, sir? Chaymaid! Gelen box num seven, not go sleep here, gome.'

He sat in the same place as the day died, looking at the

dull houses opposite, and thinking, if the disembodied spirits of former inhabitants were ever conscious of them, how they must pity themselves for their old places of imprisonment. Sometimes a face would appear behind the dingy glass of a window, and would fade away into the gloom as if it had seen enough of life and had vanished out of it. Presently the rain began to fall in slanting lines between him and those houses, and people began to collect under cover of the public passage opposite, and to look out hopelessly at the sky as the rain dropped thicker and faster. Then wet umbrellas began to appear, draggled skirts, and mud. What the mud had been doing with itself, or where it came from, who could say? But it seemed to collect in a moment, as a crowd will, and in five minutes to have splashed all the sons and daughters of Adam. The lamplighter was going his rounds now; and as the fiery jets sprang up under his touch, one might have fancied them astonished at being suffered to introduce any show of brightness into such a dismal scene.

Mr Arthur Clennam took up his hat and buttoned his coat, and walked out. In the country, the rain would have developed a thousand fresh scents, and every drop would have had its bright association with some beautiful form of growth or life. In the city, it developed only foul stale smells, and was a sickly, lukewarm, dirt-stained, wretched addition to the gutters.

He crossed by St Paul's and went down, at a long angle, almost to the water's edge, through some of the crooked and descending streets which lie (and lay more crookedly and closely

then) between the river and Cheapside. Passing, now the mouldy hall of some obsolete Worshipful Company, now the illuminated windows of a Congregationless Church that seemed to be waiting for some adventurous Belzoni to dig it out and discover its history; passing silent warehouses and wharves, and here and there a narrow alley leading to the river, where a wretched little bill, FOUND DROWNED, was weeping on the wet wall; he came at last to the house he sought. An old brick house, so dingy as to be all but black, standing by itself within a gateway. Before it, a square court-yard where a shrub or two and a patch of grass were as rank (which is saying much) as the iron railings enclosing them were rusty; behind it, a jumble of roots. It was a double house, with long, narrow, heavily-framed windows. Many years ago, it had had it in its mind to slide down sideways; it had been propped up, however, and was leaning on some half-dozen gigantic crutches: which gymnasium for the neighbouring cats, weather-stained, smoke-blackened, and overgrown with weeds, appeared in these latter days to be no very sure reliance.

'Nothing changed,' said the traveller, stopping to look round. 'Dark and miserable as ever. A light in my mother's window, which seems never to have been extinguished since I came home twice a year from school, and dragged my box over this pavement. Well, well, well!'

He went up to the door, which had a projecting canopy in carved work of festooned jack-towels and children's heads with water on the brain, designed after a once-popular monumental

pattern, and knocked. A shuffling step was soon heard on the stone floor of the hall, and the door was opened by an old man, bent and dried, but with keen eyes.

He had a candle in his hand, and he held it up for a moment to assist his keen eyes. 'Ah, Mr Arthur?' he said, without any emotion, 'you are come at last? Step in.'

Mr Arthur stepped in and shut the door.

'Your figure is filled out, and set,' said the old man, turning to look at him with the light raised again, and shaking his head; 'but you don't come up to your father in my opinion. Nor yet your mother.'

'How is my mother?'

'She is as she always is now. Keeps her room when not actually bedridden, and hasn't been out of it fifteen times in as many years, Arthur.' They had walked into a spare, meagre dining-room. The old man had put the candlestick upon the table, and, supporting his right elbow with his left hand, was smoothing his leathern jaws while he looked at the visitor. The visitor offered his hand. The old man took it coldly enough, and seemed to prefer his jaws, to which he returned as soon as he could.

'I doubt if your mother will approve of your coming home on the Sabbath, Arthur,' he said, shaking his head warily.

'You wouldn't have me go away again?'

'Oh! I? I? I am not the master. It's not what *I* would have. I have stood between your father and mother for a number of years. I don't pretend to stand between your mother and you.'

‘Will you tell her that I have come home?’

‘Yes, Arthur, yes. Oh, to be sure! I’ll tell her that you have come home. Please to wait here. You won’t find the room changed.’ He took another candle from a cupboard, lighted it, left the first on the table, and went upon his errand. He was a short, bald old man, in a high-shouldered black coat and waistcoat, drab breeches, and long drab gaiters. He might, from his dress, have been either clerk or servant, and in fact had long been both. There was nothing about him in the way of decoration but a watch, which was lowered into the depths of its proper pocket by an old black ribbon, and had a tarnished copper key moored above it, to show where it was sunk. His head was awry, and he had a one-sided, crab-like way with him, as if his foundations had yielded at about the same time as those of the house, and he ought to have been propped up in a similar manner.

‘How weak am I,’ said Arthur Clennam, when he was gone, ‘that I could shed tears at this reception! I, who have never experienced anything else; who have never expected anything else.’

He not only could, but did. It was the momentary yielding of a nature that had been disappointed from the dawn of its perceptions, but had not quite given up all its hopeful yearnings yet. He subdued it, took up the candle, and examined the room. The old articles of furniture were in their old places; the Plagues of Egypt, much the dimmer for the fly and smoke plagues of London, were framed and glazed upon the walls. There was the

old cellaret with nothing in it, lined with lead, like a sort of coffin in compartments; there was the old dark closet, also with nothing in it, of which he had been many a time the sole contents, in days of punishment, when he had regarded it as the veritable entrance to that bourne to which the tract had found him galloping. There was the large, hard-featured clock on the sideboard, which he used to see bending its figured brows upon him with a savage joy when he was behind-hand with his lessons, and which, when it was wound up once a week with an iron handle, used to sound as if it were growling in ferocious anticipation of the miseries into which it would bring him. But here was the old man come back, saying, 'Arthur, I'll go before and light you.'

Arthur followed him up the staircase, which was panelled off into spaces like so many mourning tablets, into a dim bed-chamber, the floor of which had gradually so sunk and settled, that the fire-place was in a dell. On a black bier-like sofa in this hollow, propped up behind with one great angular black bolster like the block at a state execution in the good old times, sat his mother in a widow's dress.

She and his father had been at variance from his earliest remembrance. To sit speechless himself in the midst of rigid silence, glancing in dread from the one averted face to the other, had been the peacefullest occupation of his childhood. She gave him one glassy kiss, and four stiff fingers muffled in worsted. This embrace concluded, he sat down on the opposite side of her little table. There was a fire in the grate, as there had been

night and day for fifteen years. There was a kettle on the hob, as there had been night and day for fifteen years. There was a little mound of damped ashes on the top of the fire, and another little mound swept together under the grate, as there had been night and day for fifteen years. There was a smell of black dye in the airless room, which the fire had been drawing out of the crape and stuff of the widow's dress for fifteen months, and out of the bier-like sofa for fifteen years.

'Mother, this is a change from your old active habits.'

'The world has narrowed to these dimensions, Arthur,' she replied, glancing round the room. 'It is well for me that I never set my heart upon its hollow vanities.'

The old influence of her presence and her stern strong voice, so gathered about her son, that he felt conscious of a renewal of the timid chill and reserve of his childhood.

'Do you never leave your room, mother?'

'What with my rheumatic affection, and what with its attendant debility or nervous weakness – names are of no matter now – I have lost the use of my limbs. I never leave my room. I have not been outside this door for – tell him for how long,' she said, speaking over her shoulder.

'A dozen year next Christmas,' returned a cracked voice out of the dimness behind.

'Is that Affery?' said Arthur, looking towards it.

The cracked voice replied that it was Affery: and an old woman came forward into what doubtful light there was, and

kissed her hand once; then subsided again into the dimness.

'I am able,' said Mrs Clennam, with a slight motion of her worsted-muffled right hand toward a chair on wheels, standing before a tall writing cabinet close shut up, 'I am able to attend to my business duties, and I am thankful for the privilege. It is a great privilege. But no more of business on this day. It is a bad night, is it not?'

'Yes, mother.'

'Does it snow?'

'Snow, mother? And we only yet in September?'

'All seasons are alike to me,' she returned, with a grim kind of luxuriousness. 'I know nothing of summer and winter, shut up here. The Lord has been pleased to put me beyond all that.' With her cold grey eyes and her cold grey hair, and her immovable face, as stiff as the folds of her stony head-dress, – her being beyond the reach of the seasons seemed but a fit sequence to her being beyond the reach of all changing emotions.

On her little table lay two or three books, her handkerchief, a pair of steel spectacles newly taken off, and an old-fashioned gold watch in a heavy double case. Upon this last object her son's eyes and her own now rested together.

'I see that you received the packet I sent you on my father's death, safely, mother.'

'You see.'

'I never knew my father to show so much anxiety on any subject, as that his watch should be sent straight to you.'

‘I keep it here as a remembrance of your father.’

‘It was not until the last, that he expressed the wish; when he could only put his hand upon it, and very indistinctly say to me “your mother.” A moment before, I thought him wandering in his mind, as he had been for many hours – I think he had no consciousness of pain in his short illness – when I saw him turn himself in his bed and try to open it.’

‘Was your father, then, not wandering in his mind when he tried to open it?’

‘No. He was quite sensible at that time.’

Mrs Clennam shook her head; whether in dismissal of the deceased or opposing herself to her son’s opinion, was not clearly expressed.

‘After my father’s death I opened it myself, thinking there might be, for anything I knew, some memorandum there. However, as I need not tell you, mother, there was nothing but the old silk watch-paper worked in beads, which you found (no doubt) in its place between the cases, where I found and left it.’

Mrs Clennam signified assent; then added, ‘No more of business on this day,’ and then added, ‘Affery, it is nine o’clock.’

Upon this, the old woman cleared the little table, went out of the room, and quickly returned with a tray on which was a dish of little rusks and a small precise pat of butter, cool, symmetrical, white, and plump. The old man who had been standing by the door in one attitude during the whole interview, looking at the mother up-stairs as he had looked at the son down-stairs, went

out at the same time, and, after a longer absence, returned with another tray on which was the greater part of a bottle of port wine (which, to judge by his panting, he had brought from the cellar), a lemon, a sugar-basin, and a spice box. With these materials and the aid of the kettle, he filled a tumbler with a hot and odorous mixture, measured out and compounded with as much nicety as a physician's prescription. Into this mixture Mrs Clennam dipped certain of the rusks, and ate them; while the old woman buttered certain other of the rusks, which were to be eaten alone. When the invalid had eaten all the rusks and drunk all the mixture, the two trays were removed; and the books and the candle, watch, handkerchief, and spectacles were replaced upon the table. She then put on the spectacles and read certain passages aloud from a book – sternly, fiercely, wrathfully – praying that her enemies (she made them by her tone and manner expressly hers) might be put to the edge of the sword, consumed by fire, smitten by plagues and leprosy, that their bones might be ground to dust, and that they might be utterly exterminated. As she read on, years seemed to fall away from her son like the imaginings of a dream, and all the old dark horrors of his usual preparation for the sleep of an innocent child to overshadow him.

She shut the book and remained for a little time with her face shaded by her hand. So did the old man, otherwise still unchanged in attitude; so, probably, did the old woman in her dimmer part of the room. Then the sick woman was ready for bed.

‘Good night, Arthur. Affery will see to your accommodation. Only touch me, for my hand is tender.’ He touched the worsted muffling of her hand – that was nothing; if his mother had been sheathed in brass there would have been no new barrier between them – and followed the old man and woman down-stairs.

The latter asked him, when they were alone together among the heavy shadows of the dining-room, would he have some supper?

‘No, Affery, no supper.’

‘You shall if you like,’ said Affery. ‘There’s her tomorrow’s partridge in the larder – her first this year; say the word and I’ll cook it.’

No, he had not long dined, and could eat nothing.

‘Have something to drink, then,’ said Affery; ‘you shall have some of her bottle of port, if you like. I’ll tell Jeremiah that you ordered me to bring it you.’

No; nor would he have that, either.

‘It’s no reason, Arthur,’ said the old woman, bending over him to whisper, ‘that because I am afeared of my life of ‘em, you should be. You’ve got half the property, haven’t you?’

‘Yes, yes.’

‘Well then, don’t you be cowed. You’re clever, Arthur, an’t you?’

He nodded, as she seemed to expect an answer in the affirmative.

‘Then stand up against them! She’s awful clever, and none but

a clever one durst say a word to her. *He's* a clever one – oh, he's a clever one! – and he gives it her when he has a mind to't, he does!'

'Your husband does?'

'Does? It makes me shake from head to foot, to hear him give it her. My husband, Jeremiah Flintwinch, can conquer even your mother. What can he be but a clever one to do that!'

His shuffling footstep coming towards them caused her to retreat to the other end of the room. Though a tall, hard-favoured, sinewy old woman, who in her youth might have enlisted in the Foot Guards without much fear of discovery, she collapsed before the little keen-eyed crab-like old man.

'Now, Affery,' said he, 'now, woman, what are you doing? Can't you find Master Arthur something or another to pick at?'

Master Arthur repeated his recent refusal to pick at anything.

'Very well, then,' said the old man; 'make his bed. Stir yourself.' His neck was so twisted that the knotted ends of his white cravat usually dangled under one ear; his natural acerbity and energy, always contending with a second nature of habitual repression, gave his features a swollen and suffused look; and altogether, he had a weird appearance of having hanged himself at one time or other, and of having gone about ever since, halter and all, exactly as some timely hand had cut him down.

'You'll have bitter words together to-morrow, Arthur; you and your mother,' said Jeremiah. 'Your having given up the business on your father's death – which she suspects, though we have left it to you to tell her – won't go off smoothly.'

‘I have given up everything in life for the business, and the time came for me to give up that.’

‘Good!’ cried Jeremiah, evidently meaning Bad. ‘Very good! only don’t expect me to stand between your mother and you, Arthur. I stood between your mother and your father, fending off this, and fending off that, and getting crushed and pounded betwixt em; and I’ve done with such work.’

‘You will never be asked to begin it again for me, Jeremiah.’

‘Good. I’m glad to hear it; because I should have had to decline it, if I had been. That’s enough – as your mother says – and more than enough of such matters on a Sabbath night. Affery, woman, have you found what you want yet?’

She had been collecting sheets and blankets from a press, and hastened to gather them up, and to reply, ‘Yes, Jeremiah.’ Arthur Clennam helped her by carrying the load himself, wished the old man good night, and went up-stairs with her to the top of the house.

They mounted up and up, through the musty smell of an old close house, little used, to a large garret bed-room. Meagre and spare, like all the other rooms, it was even uglier and grimmer than the rest, by being the place of banishment for the worn-out furniture. Its movables were ugly old chairs with worn-out seats, and ugly old chairs without any seats; a threadbare patternless carpet, a maimed table, a crippled wardrobe, a lean set of fire-irons like the skeleton of a set deceased, a washing-stand that looked as if it had stood for ages in a hail of dirty soapsuds,

and a bedstead with four bare atomies of posts, each terminating in a spike, as if for the dismal accommodation of lodgers who might prefer to impale themselves. Arthur opened the long low window, and looked out upon the old blasted and blackened forest of chimneys, and the old red glare in the sky, which had seemed to him once upon a time but a nightly reflection of the fiery environment that was presented to his childish fancy in all directions, let it look where it would.

He drew in his head again, sat down at the bedside, and looked on at Affery Flintwinch making the bed.

'Affery, you were not married when I went away.'

She screwed her mouth into the form of saying 'No,' shook her head, and proceeded to get a pillow into its case.

'How did it happen?'

'Why, Jeremiah, o' course,' said Affery, with an end of the pillow-case between her teeth.

'Of course he proposed it, but how did it all come about? I should have thought that neither of you would have married; least of all should I have thought of your marrying each other.'

'No more should I,' said Mrs Flintwinch, tying the pillow tightly in its case.

'That's what I mean. When did you begin to think otherwise?'

'Never begun to think otherwise at all,' said Mrs Flintwinch.

Seeing, as she patted the pillow into its place on the bolster, that he was still looking at her as if waiting for the rest of her reply, she gave it a great poke in the middle, and asked, 'How

could I help myself?'

'How could you help yourself from being married!'

'O' course,' said Mrs Flintwinch. 'It was no doing o' mine. I'd never thought of it. I'd got something to do, without thinking, indeed! She kept me to it (as well as he) when she could go about, and she could go about then.'

'Well?'

'Well?' echoed Mrs Flintwinch. 'That's what I said myself. Well! What's the use of considering? If them two clever ones have made up their minds to it, what's left for *me* to do? Nothing.'

'Was it my mother's project, then?'

'The Lord bless you, Arthur, and forgive me the wish!' cried Affery, speaking always in a low tone. 'If they hadn't been both of a mind in it, how could it ever have been? Jeremiah never courted me; t'ant likely that he would, after living in the house with me and ordering me about for as many years as he'd done. He said to me one day, he said, "Affery," he said, "now I am going to tell you something. What do you think of the name of Flintwinch?" "What do I think of it?" I says. "Yes," he said, "because you're going to take it," he said. "Take it?" I says. "Jere-*mi*-ah?" Oh! he's a clever one!'

Mrs Flintwinch went on to spread the upper sheet over the bed, and the blanket over that, and the counterpane over that, as if she had quite concluded her story.

'Well?' said Arthur again.

'Well?' echoed Mrs Flintwinch again. 'How could I help

myself? He said to me, "Affery, you and me must be married, and I'll tell you why. She's failing in health, and she'll want pretty constant attendance up in her room, and we shall have to be much with her, and there'll be nobody about now but ourselves when we're away from her, and altogether it will be more convenient. She's of my opinion," he said, "so if you'll put your bonnet on next Monday morning at eight, we'll get it over.'" Mrs Flintwinch tucked up the bed.

'Well?'

'Well?' repeated Mrs Flintwinch, 'I think so! I sits me down and says it. Well! – Jeremiah then says to me, "As to banns, next Sunday being the third time of asking (for I've put 'em up a fortnight), is my reason for naming Monday. She'll speak to you about it herself, and now she'll find you prepared, Affery." That same day she spoke to me, and she said, "So, Affery, I understand that you and Jeremiah are going to be married. I am glad of it, and so are you, with reason. It is a very good thing for you, and very welcome under the circumstances to me. He is a sensible man, and a trustworthy man, and a persevering man, and a pious man." What could I say when it had come to that? Why, if it had been – a smothering instead of a wedding,' Mrs Flintwinch cast about in her mind with great pains for this form of expression, 'I couldn't have said a word upon it, against them two clever ones.'

'In good faith, I believe so.'

'And so you may, Arthur.'

'Affery, what girl was that in my mother's room just now?'

‘Girl?’ said Mrs Flintwinch in a rather sharp key.

‘It was a girl, surely, whom I saw near you – almost hidden in the dark corner?’

‘Oh! She? Little Dorrit? *She*’s nothing; she’s a whim of – hers.’ It was a peculiarity of Affery Flintwinch that she never spoke of Mrs Clennam by name. ‘But there’s another sort of girls than that about. Have you forgot your old sweetheart? Long and long ago, I’ll be bound.’

‘I suffered enough from my mother’s separating us, to remember her. I recollect her very well.’

‘Have you got another?’

‘No.’

‘Here’s news for you, then. She’s well to do now, and a widow. And if you like to have her, why you can.’

‘And how do you know that, Affery?’

‘Them two clever ones have been speaking about it. – There’s Jeremiah on the stairs!’ She was gone in a moment.

Mrs Flintwinch had introduced into the web that his mind was busily weaving, in that old workshop where the loom of his youth had stood, the last thread wanting to the pattern. The airy folly of a boy’s love had found its way even into that house, and he had been as wretched under its hopelessness as if the house had been a castle of romance. Little more than a week ago at Marseilles, the face of the pretty girl from whom he had parted with regret, had had an unusual interest for him, and a tender hold upon him, because of some resemblance, real or imagined, to this first face

that had soared out of his gloomy life into the bright glories of fancy. He leaned upon the sill of the long low window, and looking out upon the blackened forest of chimneys again, began to dream; for it had been the uniform tendency of this man's life – so much was wanting in it to think about, so much that might have been better directed and happier to speculate upon – to make him a dreamer, after all.

CHAPTER 4. Mrs Flintwinch has a Dream

When Mrs Flintwinch dreamed, she usually dreamed, unlike the son of her old mistress, with her eyes shut. She had a curiously vivid dream that night, and before she had left the son of her old mistress many hours. In fact it was not at all like a dream; it was so very real in every respect. It happened in this wise.

The bed-chamber occupied by Mr and Mrs Flintwinch was within a few paces of that to which Mrs Clennam had been so long confined. It was not on the same floor, for it was a room at the side of the house, which was approached by a steep descent of a few odd steps, diverging from the main staircase nearly opposite to Mrs Clennam's door. It could scarcely be said to be within call, the walls, doors, and panelling of the old place were so cumbrous; but it was within easy reach, in any undress, at any hour of the night, in any temperature. At the head of the bed and within a foot of Mrs Flintwinch's ear, was a bell, the line of which hung ready to Mrs Clennam's hand. Whenever this bell rang, up started Affery, and was in the sick room before she was awake.

Having got her mistress into bed, lighted her lamp, and given her good night, Mrs Flintwinch went to roost as usual, saving that her lord had not yet appeared. It was her lord himself who became – unlike the last theme in the mind, according to the observation of most philosophers – the subject of Mrs

Flintwinch's dream.

It seemed to her that she awoke after sleeping some hours, and found Jeremiah not yet abed. That she looked at the candle she had left burning, and, measuring the time like King Alfred the Great, was confirmed by its wasted state in her belief that she had been asleep for some considerable period. That she arose thereupon, muffled herself up in a wrapper, put on her shoes, and went out on the staircase, much surprised, to look for Jeremiah.

The staircase was as wooden and solid as need be, and Affery went straight down it without any of those deviations peculiar to dreams. She did not skim over it, but walked down it, and guided herself by the banisters on account of her candle having died out. In one corner of the hall, behind the house-door, there was a little waiting-room, like a well-shaft, with a long narrow window in it as if it had been ripped up. In this room, which was never used, a light was burning.

Mrs Flintwinch crossed the hall, feeling its pavement cold to her stockingless feet, and peeped in between the rusty hinges on the door, which stood a little open. She expected to see Jeremiah fast asleep or in a fit, but he was calmly seated in a chair, awake, and in his usual health. But what – hey? – Lord forgive us! – Mrs Flintwinch muttered some ejaculation to this effect, and turned giddy.

For, Mr Flintwinch awake, was watching Mr Flintwinch asleep. He sat on one side of the small table, looking keenly at himself on the other side with his chin sunk on his breast,

snoring. The waking Flintwinch had his full front face presented to his wife; the sleeping Flintwinch was in profile. The waking Flintwinch was the old original; the sleeping Flintwinch was the double, just as she might have distinguished between a tangible object and its reflection in a glass, Affery made out this difference with her head going round and round.

If she had had any doubt which was her own Jeremiah, it would have been resolved by his impatience. He looked about him for an offensive weapon, caught up the snuffers, and, before applying them to the cabbage-headed candle, lunged at the sleeper as though he would have run him through the body.

'Who's that? What's the matter?' cried the sleeper, starting.

Mr Flintwinch made a movement with the snuffers, as if he would have enforced silence on his companion by putting them down his throat; the companion, coming to himself, said, rubbing his eyes, 'I forgot where I was.'

'You have been asleep,' snarled Jeremiah, referring to his watch, 'two hours. You said you would be rested enough if you had a short nap.'

'I have had a short nap,' said Double.

'Half-past two o'clock in the morning,' muttered Jeremiah. 'Where's your hat? Where's your coat? Where's the box?'

'All here,' said Double, tying up his throat with sleepy carefulness in a shawl. 'Stop a minute. Now give me the sleeve – not that sleeve, the other one. Ha! I'm not as young as I was.' Mr Flintwinch had pulled him into his coat with vehement energy.

‘You promised me a second glass after I was rested.’

‘Drink it!’ returned Jeremiah, ‘and – choke yourself, I was going to say – but go, I mean.’ At the same time he produced the identical port-wine bottle, and filled a wine-glass.

‘Her port-wine, I believe?’ said Double, tasting it as if he were in the Docks, with hours to spare. ‘Her health.’

He took a sip.

‘Your health!’

He took another sip.

‘His health!’

He took another sip.

‘And all friends round St Paul’s.’ He emptied and put down the wine-glass half-way through this ancient civic toast, and took up the box. It was an iron box some two feet square, which he carried under his arms pretty easily. Jeremiah watched his manner of adjusting it, with jealous eyes; tried it with his hands, to be sure that he had a firm hold of it; bade him for his life be careful what he was about; and then stole out on tiptoe to open the door for him. Affery, anticipating the last movement, was on the staircase. The sequence of things was so ordinary and natural, that, standing there, she could hear the door open, feel the night air, and see the stars outside.

But now came the most remarkable part of the dream. She felt so afraid of her husband, that being on the staircase, she had not the power to retreat to her room (which she might easily have done before he had fastened the door), but stood there staring.

Consequently when he came up the staircase to bed, candle in hand, he came full upon her. He looked astonished, but said not a word. He kept his eyes upon her, and kept advancing; and she, completely under his influence, kept retiring before him. Thus, she walking backward and he walking forward, they came into their own room. They were no sooner shut in there, than Mr Flintwinch took her by the throat, and shook her until she was black in the face.

'Why, Affery, woman – Affery!' said Mr Flintwinch. 'What have you been dreaming of? Wake up, wake up! What's the matter?'

'The – the matter, Jeremiah?' gasped Mrs Flintwinch, rolling her eyes.

'Why, Affery, woman – Affery! You have been getting out of bed in your sleep, my dear! I come up, after having fallen asleep myself, below, and find you in your wrapper here, with the nightmare. Affery, woman,' said Mr Flintwinch, with a friendly grin on his expressive countenance, 'if you ever have a dream of this sort again, it'll be a sign of your being in want of physic. And I'll give you such a dose, old woman – such a dose!'

Mrs Flintwinch thanked him and crept into bed.

CHAPTER 5. Family Affairs

As the city clocks struck nine on Monday morning, Mrs Clennam was wheeled by Jeremiah Flintwinch of the cut-down aspect to her tall cabinet. When she had unlocked and opened it, and had settled herself at its desk, Jeremiah withdrew – as it might be, to hang himself more effectually – and her son appeared.

'Are you any better this morning, mother?'

She shook her head, with the same austere air of luxuriousness that she had shown over-night when speaking of the weather. 'I shall never be better any more. It is well for me, Arthur, that I know it and can bear it.'

Sitting with her hands laid separately upon the desk, and the tall cabinet towering before her, she looked as if she were performing on a dumb church organ. Her son thought so (it was an old thought with him), while he took his seat beside it.

She opened a drawer or two, looked over some business papers, and put them back again. Her severe face had no thread of relaxation in it, by which any explorer could have been guided to the gloomy labyrinth of her thoughts.

'Shall I speak of our affairs, mother? Are you inclined to enter upon business?'

'Am I inclined, Arthur? Rather, are you? Your father has been dead a year and more. I have been at your disposal, and waiting

your pleasure, ever since.'

'There was much to arrange before I could leave; and when I did leave, I travelled a little for rest and relief.'

She turned her face towards him, as not having heard or understood his last words.

'For rest and relief.'

She glanced round the sombre room, and appeared from the motion of her lips to repeat the words to herself, as calling it to witness how little of either it afforded her.

'Besides, mother, you being sole executrix, and having the direction and management of the estate, there remained little business, or I might say none, that I could transact, until you had had time to arrange matters to your satisfaction.'

'The accounts are made out,' she returned. 'I have them here. The vouchers have all been examined and passed. You can inspect them when you like, Arthur; now, if you please.'

'It is quite enough, mother, to know that the business is completed. Shall I proceed then?'

'Why not?' she said, in her frozen way.

'Mother, our House has done less and less for some years past, and our dealings have been progressively on the decline. We have never shown much confidence, or invited much; we have attached no people to us; the track we have kept is not the track of the time; and we have been left far behind. I need not dwell on this to you, mother. You know it necessarily.'

'I know what you mean,' she answered, in a qualified tone.

‘Even this old house in which we speak,’ pursued her son, ‘is an instance of what I say. In my father’s earlier time, and in his uncle’s time before him, it was a place of business – really a place of business, and business resort. Now, it is a mere anomaly and incongruity here, out of date and out of purpose. All our consignments have long been made to Rovinghams’ the commission-merchants; and although, as a check upon them, and in the stewardship of my father’s resources, your judgment and watchfulness have been actively exerted, still those qualities would have influenced my father’s fortunes equally, if you had lived in any private dwelling: would they not?’

‘Do you consider,’ she returned, without answering his question, ‘that a house serves no purpose, Arthur, in sheltering your infirm and afflicted – justly infirm and righteously afflicted – mother?’

‘I was speaking only of business purposes.’

‘With what object?’

‘I am coming to it.’

‘I foresee,’ she returned, fixing her eyes upon him, ‘what it is. But the Lord forbid that I should repine under any visitation. In my sinfulness I merit bitter disappointment, and I accept it.’

‘Mother, I grieve to hear you speak like this, though I have had my apprehensions that you would – ’

‘You knew I would. You knew *me*,’ she interrupted.

Her son paused for a moment. He had struck fire out of her, and was surprised. ‘Well!’ she said, relapsing into stone. ‘Go on.

Let me hear.'

'You have anticipated, mother, that I decide for my part, to abandon the business. I have done with it. I will not take upon myself to advise you; you will continue it, I see. If I had any influence with you, I would simply use it to soften your judgment of me in causing you this disappointment: to represent to you that I have lived the half of a long term of life, and have never before set my own will against yours. I cannot say that I have been able to conform myself, in heart and spirit, to your rules; I cannot say that I believe my forty years have been profitable or pleasant to myself, or any one; but I have habitually submitted, and I only ask you to remember it.'

Woe to the suppliant, if such a one there were or ever had been, who had any concession to look for in the inexorable face at the cabinet. Woe to the defaulter whose appeal lay to the tribunal where those severe eyes presided. Great need had the rigid woman of her mystical religion, veiled in gloom and darkness, with lightnings of cursing, vengeance, and destruction, flashing through the sable clouds. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, was a prayer too poor in spirit for her. Smite Thou my debtors, Lord, wither them, crush them; do Thou as I would do, and Thou shalt have my worship: this was the impious tower of stone she built up to scale Heaven.

'Have you finished, Arthur, or have you anything more to say to me? I think there can be nothing else. You have been short, but full of matter!'

‘Mother, I have yet something more to say. It has been upon my mind, night and day, this long time. It is far more difficult to say than what I have said. That concerned myself; this concerns us all.’

‘Us all! Who are us all?’

‘Yourself, myself, my dead father.’

She took her hands from the desk; folded them in her lap; and sat looking towards the fire, with the impenetrability of an old Egyptian sculpture.

‘You knew my father infinitely better than I ever knew him; and his reserve with me yielded to you. You were much the stronger, mother, and directed him. As a child, I knew it as well as I know it now. I knew that your ascendancy over him was the cause of his going to China to take care of the business there, while you took care of it here (though I do not even now know whether these were really terms of separation that you agreed upon); and that it was your will that I should remain with you until I was twenty, and then go to him as I did. You will not be offended by my recalling this, after twenty years?’

‘I am waiting to hear why you recall it.’

He lowered his voice, and said, with manifest reluctance, and against his will:

‘I want to ask you, mother, whether it ever occurred to you to suspect – ’

At the word Suspect, she turned her eyes momentarily upon her son, with a dark frown. She then suffered them to seek the

fire, as before; but with the frown fixed above them, as if the sculptor of old Egypt had indented it in the hard granite face, to frown for ages.

' – that he had any secret remembrance which caused him trouble of mind – remorse? Whether you ever observed anything in his conduct suggesting that; or ever spoke to him upon it, or ever heard him hint at such a thing?'

'I do not understand what kind of secret remembrance you mean to infer that your father was a prey to,' she returned, after a silence. 'You speak so mysteriously.'

'Is it possible, mother,' her son leaned forward to be the nearer to her while he whispered it, and laid his hand nervously upon her desk, 'is it possible, mother, that he had unhappily wronged any one, and made no reparation?'

Looking at him wrathfully, she bent herself back in her chair to keep him further off, but gave him no reply.

'I am deeply sensible, mother, that if this thought has never at any time flashed upon you, it must seem cruel and unnatural in me, even in this confidence, to breathe it. But I cannot shake it off. Time and change (I have tried both before breaking silence) do nothing to wear it out. Remember, I was with my father. Remember, I saw his face when he gave the watch into my keeping, and struggled to express that he sent it as a token you would understand, to you. Remember, I saw him at the last with the pencil in his failing hand, trying to write some word for you to read, but to which he could give no shape. The more

remote and cruel this vague suspicion that I have, the stronger the circumstances that could give it any semblance of probability to me. For Heaven's sake, let us examine sacredly whether there is any wrong entrusted to us to set right. No one can help towards it, mother, but you.'

Still so recoiling in her chair that her overpoised weight moved it, from time to time, a little on its wheels, and gave her the appearance of a phantom of fierce aspect gliding away from him, she interposed her left arm, bent at the elbow with the back of her hand towards her face, between herself and him, and looked at him in a fixed silence.

'In grasping at money and in driving hard bargains – I have begun, and I must speak of such things now, mother – some one may have been grievously deceived, injured, ruined. You were the moving power of all this machinery before my birth; your stronger spirit has been infused into all my father's dealings for more than two score years. You can set these doubts at rest, I think, if you will really help me to discover the truth. Will you, mother?'

He stopped in the hope that she would speak. But her grey hair was not more immovable in its two folds, than were her firm lips.

'If reparation can be made to any one, if restitution can be made to any one, let us know it and make it. Nay, mother, if within my means, let *me* make it. I have seen so little happiness come of money; it has brought within my knowledge so little peace to this house, or to any one belonging to it, that it is worth

less to me than to another. It can buy me nothing that will not be a reproach and misery to me, if I am haunted by a suspicion that it darkened my father's last hours with remorse, and that it is not honestly and justly mine.'

There was a bell-rope hanging on the panelled wall, some two or three yards from the cabinet. By a swift and sudden action of her foot, she drove her wheeled chair rapidly back to it and pulled it violently – still holding her arm up in its shield-like posture, as if he were striking at her, and she warding off the blow.

A girl came hurrying in, frightened.

'Send Flintwinch here!'

In a moment the girl had withdrawn, and the old man stood within the door. 'What! You're hammer and tongs, already, you two?' he said, coolly stroking his face. 'I thought you would be. I was pretty sure of it.'

'Flintwinch!' said the mother, 'look at my son. Look at him!'

'Well, I *am* looking at him,' said Flintwinch.

She stretched out the arm with which she had shielded herself, and as she went on, pointed at the object of her anger.

'In the very hour of his return almost – before the shoe upon his foot is dry – he asperses his father's memory to his mother! Asks his mother to become, with him, a spy upon his father's transactions through a lifetime! Has misgivings that the goods of this world which we have painfully got together early and late, with wear and tear and toil and self-denial, are so much plunder; and asks to whom they shall be given up, as reparation

and restitution!'

Although she said this raging, she said it in a voice so far from being beyond her control that it was even lower than her usual tone. She also spoke with great distinctness.

'Reparation!' said she. 'Yes, truly! It is easy for him to talk of reparation, fresh from journeying and junketing in foreign lands, and living a life of vanity and pleasure. But let him look at me, in prison, and in bonds here. I endure without murmuring, because it is appointed that I shall so make reparation for my sins. Reparation! Is there none in this room? Has there been none here this fifteen years?'

Thus was she always balancing her bargains with the Majesty of heaven, posting up the entries to her credit, strictly keeping her set-off, and claiming her due. She was only remarkable in this, for the force and emphasis with which she did it. Thousands upon thousands do it, according to their varying manner, every day.

'Flintwinch, give me that book!'

The old man handed it to her from the table. She put two fingers between the leaves, closed the book upon them, and held it up to her son in a threatening way.

'In the days of old, Arthur, treated of in this commentary, there were pious men, beloved of the Lord, who would have cursed their sons for less than this: who would have sent them forth, and sent whole nations forth, if such had supported them, to be avoided of God and man, and perish, down to the baby at

the breast. But I only tell you that if you ever renew that theme with me, I will renounce you; I will so dismiss you through that doorway, that you had better have been motherless from your cradle. I will never see or know you more. And if, after all, you were to come into this darkened room to look upon me lying dead, my body should bleed, if I could make it, when you came near me.'

In part relieved by the intensity of this threat, and in part (monstrous as the fact is) by a general impression that it was in some sort a religious proceeding, she handed back the book to the old man, and was silent.

'Now,' said Jeremiah; 'premising that I'm not going to stand between you two, will you let me ask (as I *have* been called in, and made a third) what is all this about?'

'Take your version of it,' returned Arthur, finding it left to him to speak, 'from my mother. Let it rest there. What I have said, was said to my mother only.'

'Oh!' returned the old man. 'From your mother? Take it from your mother? Well! But your mother mentioned that you had been suspecting your father. That's not dutiful, Mr Arthur. Who will you be suspecting next?'

'Enough,' said Mrs Clennam, turning her face so that it was addressed for the moment to the old man only. 'Let no more be said about this.'

'Yes, but stop a bit, stop a bit,' the old man persisted. 'Let us see how we stand. Have you told Mr Arthur that he mustn't lay

offences at his father's door? That he has no right to do it? That he has no ground to go upon?'

'I tell him so now.'

'Ah! Exactly,' said the old man. 'You tell him so now. You hadn't told him so before, and you tell him so now. Ay, ay! That's right! You know I stood between you and his father so long, that it seems as if death had made no difference, and I was still standing between you. So I will, and so in fairness I require to have that plainly put forward. Arthur, you please to hear that you have no right to mistrust your father, and have no ground to go upon.'

He put his hands to the back of the wheeled chair, and muttering to himself, slowly wheeled his mistress back to her cabinet. 'Now,' he resumed, standing behind her: 'in case I should go away leaving things half done, and so should be wanted again when you come to the other half and get into one of your flights, has Arthur told you what he means to do about the business?'

'He has relinquished it.'

'In favour of nobody, I suppose?'

Mrs Clennam glanced at her son, leaning against one of the windows. He observed the look and said, 'To my mother, of course. She does what she pleases.'

'And if any pleasure,' she said after a short pause, 'could arise for me out of the disappointment of my expectations that my son, in the prime of his life, would infuse new youth and strength into it, and make it of great profit and power, it would be in advancing an old and faithful servant. Jeremiah, the captain deserts the ship,

but you and I will sink or float with it.'

Jeremiah, whose eyes glistened as if they saw money, darted a sudden look at the son, which seemed to say, 'I owe *you* no thanks for this; *you* have done nothing towards it!' and then told the mother that he thanked her, and that Affery thanked her, and that he would never desert her, and that Affery would never desert her. Finally, he hauled up his watch from its depths, and said, 'Eleven. Time for your oysters!' and with that change of subject, which involved no change of expression or manner, rang the bell.

But Mrs Clennam, resolved to treat herself with the greater rigour for having been supposed to be unacquainted with reparation, refused to eat her oysters when they were brought. They looked tempting; eight in number, circularly set out on a white plate on a tray covered with a white napkin, flanked by a slice of buttered French roll, and a little compact glass of cool wine and water; but she resisted all persuasions, and sent them down again – placing the act to her credit, no doubt, in her Eternal Day-Book.

This refection of oysters was not presided over by Affery, but by the girl who had appeared when the bell was rung; the same who had been in the dimly-lighted room last night. Now that he had an opportunity of observing her, Arthur found that her diminutive figure, small features, and slight spare dress, gave her the appearance of being much younger than she was. A woman, probably of not less than two-and-twenty, she might have been

passed in the street for little more than half that age. Not that her face was very youthful, for in truth there was more consideration and care in it than naturally belonged to her utmost years; but she was so little and light, so noiseless and shy, and appeared so conscious of being out of place among the three hard elders, that she had all the manner and much of the appearance of a subdued child.

In a hard way, and in an uncertain way that fluctuated between patronage and putting down, the sprinkling from a watering-pot and hydraulic pressure, Mrs Clennam showed an interest in this dependent. Even in the moment of her entrance, upon the violent ringing of the bell, when the mother shielded herself with that singular action from the son, Mrs Clennam's eyes had had some individual recognition in them, which seemed reserved for her. As there are degrees of hardness in the hardest metal, and shades of colour in black itself, so, even in the asperity of Mrs Clennam's demeanour towards all the rest of humanity and towards Little Dorrit, there was a fine gradation.

Little Dorrit let herself out to do needlework. At so much a day – or at so little – from eight to eight, Little Dorrit was to be hired. Punctual to the moment, Little Dorrit appeared; punctual to the moment, Little Dorrit vanished. What became of Little Dorrit between the two eights was a mystery.

Another of the moral phenomena of Little Dorrit. Besides her consideration money, her daily contract included meals. She had an extraordinary repugnance to dining in company; would

never do so, if it were possible to escape. Would always plead that she had this bit of work to begin first, or that bit of work to finish first; and would, of a certainty, scheme and plan – not very cunningly, it would seem, for she deceived no one – to dine alone. Successful in this, happy in carrying off her plate anywhere, to make a table of her lap, or a box, or the ground, or even as was supposed, to stand on tip-toe, dining moderately at a mantel-shelf; the great anxiety of Little Dorrit's day was set at rest.

It was not easy to make out Little Dorrit's face; she was so retiring, plied her needle in such removed corners, and started away so scared if encountered on the stairs. But it seemed to be a pale transparent face, quick in expression, though not beautiful in feature, its soft hazel eyes excepted. A delicately bent head, a tiny form, a quick little pair of busy hands, and a shabby dress – it must needs have been very shabby to look at all so, being so neat – were Little Dorrit as she sat at work.

For these particulars or generalities concerning Little Dorrit, Mr Arthur was indebted in the course of the day to his own eyes and to Mrs Affery's tongue. If Mrs Affery had had any will or way of her own, it would probably have been unfavourable to Little Dorrit. But as 'them two clever ones' – Mrs Affery's perpetual reference, in whom her personality was swallowed up – were agreed to accept Little Dorrit as a matter of course, she had nothing for it but to follow suit. Similarly, if the two clever ones had agreed to murder Little Dorrit by candlelight, Mrs Affery, being required to hold the candle, would no doubt have done it.

In the intervals of roasting the partridge for the invalid chamber, and preparing a baking-dish of beef and pudding for the dining-room, Mrs Affery made the communications above set forth; invariably putting her head in at the door again after she had taken it out, to enforce resistance to the two clever ones. It appeared to have become a perfect passion with Mrs Flintwinch, that the only son should be pitted against them.

In the course of the day, too, Arthur looked through the whole house. Dull and dark he found it. The gaunt rooms, deserted for years upon years, seemed to have settled down into a gloomy lethargy from which nothing could rouse them again. The furniture, at once spare and lumbering, hid in the rooms rather than furnished them, and there was no colour in all the house; such colour as had ever been there, had long ago started away on lost sunbeams – got itself absorbed, perhaps, into flowers, butterflies, plumage of birds, precious stones, what not. There was not one straight floor from the foundation to the roof; the ceilings were so fantastically clouded by smoke and dust, that old women might have told fortunes in them better than in grouts of tea; the dead-cold hearths showed no traces of having ever been warmed but in heaps of soot that had tumbled down the chimneys, and eddied about in little dusky whirlwinds when the doors were opened. In what had once been a drawing-room, there were a pair of meagre mirrors, with dismal processions of black figures carrying black garlands, walking round the frames; but even these were short of heads and legs, and one undertaker-like

Cupid had swung round on its own axis and got upside down, and another had fallen off altogether. The room Arthur Clennam's deceased father had occupied for business purposes, when he first remembered him, was so unaltered that he might have been imagined still to keep it invisibly, as his visible relict kept her room up-stairs; Jeremiah Flintwinch still going between them negotiating.

His picture, dark and gloomy, earnestly speechless on the wall, with the eyes intently looking at his son as they had looked when life departed from them, seemed to urge him awfully to the task he had attempted; but as to any yielding on the part of his mother, he had now no hope, and as to any other means of setting his distrust at rest, he had abandoned hope a long time. Down in the cellars, as up in the bed-chambers, old objects that he well remembered were changed by age and decay, but were still in their old places; even to empty beer-casks hoary with cobwebs, and empty wine-bottles with fur and fungus choking up their throats. There, too, among unusual bottle-racks and pale slants of light from the yard above, was the strong room stored with old ledgers, which had as musty and corrupt a smell as if they were regularly balanced, in the dead small hours, by a nightly resurrection of old book-keepers.

The baking-dish was served up in a penitential manner on a shrunken cloth at an end of the dining-table, at two o'clock, when he dined with Mr Flintwinch, the new partner. Mr Flintwinch informed him that his mother had recovered her equanimity now,

and that he need not fear her again alluding to what had passed in the morning. 'And don't you lay offences at your father's door, Mr Arthur,' added Jeremiah, 'once for all, don't do it! Now, we have done with the subject.'

Mr Flintwinch had been already rearranging and dusting his own particular little office, as if to do honour to his accession to new dignity. He resumed this occupation when he was replete with beef, had sucked up all the gravy in the baking-dish with the flat of his knife, and had drawn liberally on a barrel of small beer in the scullery. Thus refreshed, he tucked up his shirt-sleeves and went to work again; and Mr Arthur, watching him as he set about it, plainly saw that his father's picture, or his father's grave, would be as communicative with him as this old man.

'Now, Affery, woman,' said Mr Flintwinch, as she crossed the hall. 'You hadn't made Mr Arthur's bed when I was up there last. Stir yourself. Bustle.'

But Mr Arthur found the house so blank and dreary, and was so unwilling to assist at another implacable consignment of his mother's enemies (perhaps himself among them) to mortal disfigurement and immortal ruin, that he announced his intention of lodging at the coffee-house where he had left his luggage. Mr Flintwinch taking kindly to the idea of getting rid of him, and his mother being indifferent, beyond considerations of saving, to most domestic arrangements that were not bounded by the walls of her own chamber, he easily carried this point without new offence. Daily business hours were agreed upon, which his

mother, Mr Flintwinch, and he, were to devote together to a necessary checking of books and papers; and he left the home he had so lately found, with depressed heart.

But Little Dorrit?

The business hours, allowing for intervals of invalid regimen of oysters and partridges, during which Clennam refreshed himself with a walk, were from ten to six for about a fortnight. Sometimes Little Dorrit was employed at her needle, sometimes not, sometimes appeared as a humble visitor: which must have been her character on the occasion of his arrival. His original curiosity augmented every day, as he watched for her, saw or did not see her, and speculated about her. Influenced by his predominant idea, he even fell into a habit of discussing with himself the possibility of her being in some way associated with it. At last he resolved to watch Little Dorrit and know more of her story.

CHAPTER 6. The Father of the Marshalsea

Thirty years ago there stood, a few doors short of the church of Saint George, in the borough of Southwark, on the left-hand side of the way going southward, the Marshalsea Prison. It had stood there many years before, and it remained there some years afterwards; but it is gone now, and the world is none the worse without it.

It was an oblong pile of barrack building, partitioned into squalid houses standing back to back, so that there were no back rooms; environed by a narrow paved yard, hemmed in by high walls duly spiked at top. Itself a close and confined prison for debtors, it contained within it a much closer and more confined jail for smugglers. Offenders against the revenue laws, and defaulters to excise or customs who had incurred fines which they were unable to pay, were supposed to be incarcerated behind an iron-plated door closing up a second prison, consisting of a strong cell or two, and a blind alley some yard and a half wide, which formed the mysterious termination of the very limited skittle-ground in which the Marshalsea debtors bowled down their troubles.

Supposed to be incarcerated there, because the time had rather outgrown the strong cells and the blind alley. In practice they had come to be considered a little too bad, though in theory

they were quite as good as ever; which may be observed to be the case at the present day with other cells that are not at all strong, and with other blind alleys that are stone-blind. Hence the smugglers habitually consorted with the debtors (who received them with open arms), except at certain constitutional moments when somebody came from some Office, to go through some form of overlooking something which neither he nor anybody else knew anything about. On these truly British occasions, the smugglers, if any, made a feint of walking into the strong cells and the blind alley, while this somebody pretended to do his something: and made a reality of walking out again as soon as he hadn't done it – neatly epitomising the administration of most of the public affairs in our right little, tight little, island.

There had been taken to the Marshalsea Prison, long before the day when the sun shone on Marseilles and on the opening of this narrative, a debtor with whom this narrative has some concern.

He was, at that time, a very amiable and very helpless middle-aged gentleman, who was going out again directly. Necessarily, he was going out again directly, because the Marshalsea lock never turned upon a debtor who was not. He brought in a portmanteau with him, which he doubted its being worth while to unpack; he was so perfectly clear – like all the rest of them, the turnkey on the lock said – that he was going out again directly.

He was a shy, retiring man; well-looking, though in an effeminate style; with a mild voice, curling hair, and irresolute

hands – rings upon the fingers in those days – which nervously wandered to his trembling lip a hundred times in the first half-hour of his acquaintance with the jail. His principal anxiety was about his wife.

'Do you think, sir,' he asked the turnkey, 'that she will be very much shocked, if she should come to the gate to-morrow morning?'

The turnkey gave it as the result of his experience that some of 'em was and some of 'em wasn't. In general, more no than yes. 'What like is she, you see?' he philosophically asked: 'that's what it hinges on.'

'She is very delicate and inexperienced indeed.'

'That,' said the turnkey, 'is agen her.'

'She is so little used to go out alone,' said the debtor, 'that I am at a loss to think how she will ever make her way here, if she walks.'

'P'raps,' quoth the turnkey, 'she'll take a ackney coach.'

'Perhaps.' The irresolute fingers went to the trembling lip. 'I hope she will. She may not think of it.'

'Or p'raps,' said the turnkey, offering his suggestions from the the top of his well-worn wooden stool, as he might have offered them to a child for whose weakness he felt a compassion, 'p'raps she'll get her brother, or her sister, to come along with her.'

'She has no brother or sister.'

'Niece, nevy, cousin, serwant, young 'ooman, greengrocer. – Dash it! One or another on 'em,' said the turnkey, repudiating

beforehand the refusal of all his suggestions.

'I fear – I hope it is not against the rules – that she will bring the children.'

'The children?' said the turnkey. 'And the rules? Why, lord set you up like a corner pin, we've a reg'lar playground o' children here. Children! Why we swarm with 'em. How many a you got?'

'Two,' said the debtor, lifting his irresolute hand to his lip again, and turning into the prison.

The turnkey followed him with his eyes. 'And you another,' he observed to himself, 'which makes three on you. And your wife another, I'll lay a crown. Which makes four on you. And another coming, I'll lay half-a-crown. Which'll make five on you. And I'll go another seven and sixpence to name which is the helplessest, the unborn baby or you!'

He was right in all his particulars. She came next day with a little boy of three years old, and a little girl of two, and he stood entirely corroborated.

'Got a room now; haven't you?' the turnkey asked the debtor after a week or two.

'Yes, I have got a very good room.'

'Any little sticks a coming to furnish it?' said the turnkey.

'I expect a few necessary articles of furniture to be delivered by the carrier, this afternoon.'

'Missis and little 'uns a coming to keep you company?' asked the turnkey.

'Why, yes, we think it better that we should not be scattered,

even for a few weeks.'

'Even for a few weeks, *of* course,' replied the turnkey. And he followed him again with his eyes, and nodded his head seven times when he was gone.

The affairs of this debtor were perplexed by a partnership, of which he knew no more than that he had invested money in it; by legal matters of assignment and settlement, conveyance here and conveyance there, suspicion of unlawful preference of creditors in this direction, and of mysterious spiriting away of property in that; and as nobody on the face of the earth could be more incapable of explaining any single item in the heap of confusion than the debtor himself, nothing comprehensible could be made of his case. To question him in detail, and endeavour to reconcile his answers; to closet him with accountants and sharp practitioners, learned in the wiles of insolvency and bankruptcy; was only to put the case out at compound interest and incomprehensibility. The irresolute fingers fluttered more and more ineffectually about the trembling lip on every such occasion, and the sharpest practitioners gave him up as a hopeless job.

'Out?' said the turnkey, '*he*'ll never get out, unless his creditors take him by the shoulders and shove him out.'

He had been there five or six months, when he came running to this turnkey one forenoon to tell him, breathless and pale, that his wife was ill.

'As anybody might a known she would be,' said the turnkey.

‘We intended,’ he returned, ‘that she should go to a country lodging only to-morrow. What am I to do! Oh, good heaven, what am I to do!’

‘Don’t waste your time in clasping your hands and biting your fingers,’ responded the practical turnkey, taking him by the elbow, ‘but come along with me.’

The turnkey conducted him – trembling from head to foot, and constantly crying under his breath, What was he to do! while his irresolute fingers bedabbled the tears upon his face – up one of the common staircases in the prison to a door on the garret story. Upon which door the turnkey knocked with the handle of his key.

‘Come in!’ cried a voice inside.

The turnkey, opening the door, disclosed in a wretched, ill-smelling little room, two hoarse, puffy, red-faced personages seated at a rickety table, playing at all-fours, smoking pipes, and drinking brandy.

‘Doctor,’ said the turnkey, ‘here’s a gentleman’s wife in want of you without a minute’s loss of time!’

The doctor’s friend was in the positive degree of hoarseness, puffiness, red-facedness, all-fours, tobacco, dirt, and brandy; the doctor in the comparative – hoarser, puffier, more red-faced, more all-fourey, tobaccoer, dirtier, and brandier. The doctor was amazingly shabby, in a torn and darned rough-weather sea-jacket, out at elbows and eminently short of buttons (he had been in his time the experienced surgeon carried by a passenger ship),

the dirtiest white trousers conceivable by mortal man, carpet slippers, and no visible linen. 'Childbed?' said the doctor. 'I'm the boy!' With that the doctor took a comb from the chimney-piece and stuck his hair upright – which appeared to be his way of washing himself – produced a professional chest or case, of most abject appearance, from the cupboard where his cup and saucer and coals were, settled his chin in the frowsy wrapper round his neck, and became a ghastly medical scarecrow.

The doctor and the debtor ran down-stairs, leaving the turnkey to return to the lock, and made for the debtor's room. All the ladies in the prison had got hold of the news, and were in the yard. Some of them had already taken possession of the two children, and were hospitably carrying them off; others were offering loans of little comforts from their own scanty store; others were sympathising with the greatest volubility. The gentlemen prisoners, feeling themselves at a disadvantage, had for the most part retired, not to say sneaked, to their rooms; from the open windows of which some of them now complimented the doctor with whistles as he passed below, while others, with several stories between them, interchanged sarcastic references to the prevalent excitement.

It was a hot summer day, and the prison rooms were baking between the high walls. In the debtor's confined chamber, Mrs Bangham, charwoman and messenger, who was not a prisoner (though she had been once), but was the popular medium of communication with the outer world, had volunteered her

services as fly-catcher and general attendant. The walls and ceiling were blackened with flies. Mrs Bangham, expert in sudden device, with one hand fanned the patient with a cabbage leaf, and with the other set traps of vinegar and sugar in gallipots; at the same time enunciating sentiments of an encouraging and congratulatory nature, adapted to the occasion.

'The flies trouble you, don't they, my dear?' said Mrs Bangham. 'But p'raps they'll take your mind off of it, and do you good. What between the buryin ground, the grocer's, the waggon-stables, and the paunch trade, the Marshalsea flies gets very large. P'raps they're sent as a consolation, if we only know'd it. How are you now, my dear? No better? No, my dear, it ain't to be expected; you'll be worse before you're better, and you know it, don't you? Yes. That's right! And to think of a sweet little cherub being born inside the lock! Now ain't it pretty, ain't *that* something to carry you through it pleasant? Why, we ain't had such a thing happen here, my dear, not for I couldn't name the time when. And you a crying too?' said Mrs Bangham, to rally the patient more and more. 'You! Making yourself so famous! With the flies a falling into the gallipots by fifties! And everything a going on so well! And here if there ain't,' said Mrs Bangham as the door opened, 'if there ain't your dear gentleman along with Dr Haggage! And now indeed we *are* complete, I *think*!'

The doctor was scarcely the kind of apparition to inspire a patient with a sense of absolute completeness, but as he presently delivered the opinion, 'We are as right as we can be, Mrs

Bangham, and we shall come out of this like a house afire;' and as he and Mrs Bangham took possession of the poor helpless pair, as everybody else and anybody else had always done, the means at hand were as good on the whole as better would have been. The special feature in Dr Haggage's treatment of the case, was his determination to keep Mrs Bangham up to the mark. As thus:

'Mrs Bangham,' said the doctor, before he had been there twenty minutes, 'go outside and fetch a little brandy, or we shall have you giving in.'

'Thank you, sir. But none on my accounts,' said Mrs Bangham.

'Mrs Bangham,' returned the doctor, 'I am in professional attendance on this lady, and don't choose to allow any discussion on your part. Go outside and fetch a little brandy, or I foresee that you'll break down.'

'You're to be obeyed, sir,' said Mrs Bangham, rising. 'If you was to put your own lips to it, I think you wouldn't be the worse, for you look but poorly, sir.'

'Mrs Bangham,' returned the doctor, 'I am not your business, thank you, but you are mine. Never you mind *me*, if you please. What you have got to do, is, to do as you are told, and to go and get what I bid you.'

Mrs Bangham submitted; and the doctor, having administered her potion, took his own. He repeated the treatment every hour, being very determined with Mrs Bangham. Three or four hours passed; the flies fell into the traps by hundreds; and at length one little life, hardly stronger than theirs, appeared among the

multitude of lesser deaths.

'A very nice little girl indeed,' said the doctor; 'little, but well-formed. Halloa, Mrs Bangham! You're looking queer! You be off, ma'am, this minute, and fetch a little more brandy, or we shall have you in hysterics.'

By this time, the rings had begun to fall from the debtor's irresolute hands, like leaves from a wintry tree. Not one was left upon them that night, when he put something that chinked into the doctor's greasy palm. In the meantime Mrs Bangham had been out on an errand to a neighbouring establishment decorated with three golden balls, where she was very well known.

'Thank you,' said the doctor, 'thank you. Your good lady is quite composed. Doing charmingly.'

'I am very happy and very thankful to know it,' said the debtor, 'though I little thought once, that – '

'That a child would be born to you in a place like this?' said the doctor. 'Bah, bah, sir, what does it signify? A little more elbow-room is all we want here. We are quiet here; we don't get badgered here; there's no knocker here, sir, to be hammered at by creditors and bring a man's heart into his mouth. Nobody comes here to ask if a man's at home, and to say he'll stand on the door mat till he is. Nobody writes threatening letters about money to this place. It's freedom, sir, it's freedom! I have had to-day's practice at home and abroad, on a march, and aboard ship, and I'll tell you this: I don't know that I have ever pursued it under such quiet circumstances as here this day. Elsewhere, people are

restless, worried, hurried about, anxious respecting one thing, anxious respecting another. Nothing of the kind here, sir. We have done all that – we know the worst of it; we have got to the bottom, we can't fall, and what have we found? Peace. That's the word for it. Peace.' With this profession of faith, the doctor, who was an old jail-bird, and was more sodden than usual, and had the additional and unusual stimulus of money in his pocket, returned to his associate and chum in hoarseness, puffiness, red-facedness, all-fours, tobacco, dirt, and brandy.

Now, the debtor was a very different man from the doctor, but he had already begun to travel, by his opposite segment of the circle, to the same point. Crushed at first by his imprisonment, he had soon found a dull relief in it. He was under lock and key; but the lock and key that kept him in, kept numbers of his troubles out. If he had been a man with strength of purpose to face those troubles and fight them, he might have broken the net that held him, or broken his heart; but being what he was, he languidly slipped into this smooth descent, and never more took one step upward.

When he was relieved of the perplexed affairs that nothing would make plain, through having them returned upon his hands by a dozen agents in succession who could make neither beginning, middle, nor end of them or him, he found his miserable place of refuge a quieter refuge than it had been before. He had unpacked the portmanteau long ago; and his elder children now played regularly about the yard, and everybody

knew the baby, and claimed a kind of proprietorship in her.

'Why, I'm getting proud of you,' said his friend the turnkey, one day. 'You'll be the oldest inhabitant soon. The Marshalsea wouldn't be like the Marshalsea now, without you and your family.'

The turnkey really was proud of him. He would mention him in laudatory terms to new-comers, when his back was turned. 'You took notice of him,' he would say, 'that went out of the lodge just now?'

New-comer would probably answer Yes.

'Brought up as a gentleman, he was, if ever a man was. Ed'cated at no end of expense. Went into the Marshal's house once to try a new piano for him. Played it, I understand, like one o'clock – beautiful! As to languages – speaks anything. We've had a Frenchman here in his time, and it's my opinion he knowed more French than the Frenchman did. We've had an Italian here in his time, and he shut *him* up in about half a minute. You'll find some characters behind other locks, I don't say you won't; but if you want the top sawyer in such respects as I've mentioned, you must come to the Marshalsea.'

When his youngest child was eight years old, his wife, who had long been languishing away – of her own inherent weakness, not that she retained any greater sensitiveness as to her place of abode than he did – went upon a visit to a poor friend and old nurse in the country, and died there. He remained shut up in his room for a fortnight afterwards; and an attorney's clerk, who

was going through the Insolvent Court, engrossed an address of condolence to him, which looked like a Lease, and which all the prisoners signed. When he appeared again he was greyer (he had soon begun to turn grey); and the turnkey noticed that his hands went often to his trembling lips again, as they had used to do when he first came in. But he got pretty well over it in a month or two; and in the meantime the children played about the yard as regularly as ever, but in black.

Then Mrs Bangham, long popular medium of communication with the outer world, began to be infirm, and to be found oftener than usual comatose on pavements, with her basket of purchases spilt, and the change of her clients ninepence short. His son began to supersede Mrs Bangham, and to execute commissions in a knowing manner, and to be of the prison prisonous, of the streets streety.

Time went on, and the turnkey began to fail. His chest swelled, and his legs got weak, and he was short of breath. The well-worn wooden stool was 'beyond him,' he complained. He sat in an arm-chair with a cushion, and sometimes wheezed so, for minutes together, that he couldn't turn the key. When he was overpowered by these fits, the debtor often turned it for him.

'You and me,' said the turnkey, one snowy winter's night when the lodge, with a bright fire in it, was pretty full of company, 'is the oldest inhabitants. I wasn't here myself above seven year before you. I shan't last long. When I'm off the lock for good and all, you'll be the Father of the Marshalsea.'

The turnkey went off the lock of this world next day. His words were remembered and repeated; and tradition afterwards handed down from generation to generation – a Marshalsea generation might be calculated as about three months – that the shabby old debtor with the soft manner and the white hair, was the Father of the Marshalsea.

And he grew to be proud of the title. If any impostor had arisen to claim it, he would have shed tears in resentment of the attempt to deprive him of his rights. A disposition began to be perceived in him to exaggerate the number of years he had been there; it was generally understood that you must deduct a few from his account; he was vain, the fleeting generations of debtors said.

All new-comers were presented to him. He was punctilious in the exaction of this ceremony. The wits would perform the office of introduction with overcharged pomp and politeness, but they could not easily overstep his sense of its gravity. He received them in his poor room (he disliked an introduction in the mere yard, as informal – a thing that might happen to anybody), with a kind of bowed-down beneficence. They were welcome to the Marshalsea, he would tell them. Yes, he was the Father of the place. So the world was kind enough to call him; and so he was, if more than twenty years of residence gave him a claim to the title. It looked small at first, but there was very good company there – among a mixture – necessarily a mixture – and very good air.

It became a not unusual circumstance for letters to be put

under his door at night, enclosing half-a-crown, two half-crowns, now and then at long intervals even half-a-sovereign, for the Father of the Marshalsea. 'With the compliments of a collegian taking leave.' He received the gifts as tributes, from admirers, to a public character. Sometimes these correspondents assumed facetious names, as the Brick, Bellows, Old Gooseberry, Wideawake, Snooks, Mops, Cutaway, the Dogs-meat Man; but he considered this in bad taste, and was always a little hurt by it.

In the fulness of time, this correspondence showing signs of wearing out, and seeming to require an effort on the part of the correspondents to which in the hurried circumstances of departure many of them might not be equal, he established the custom of attending collegians of a certain standing, to the gate, and taking leave of them there. The collegian under treatment, after shaking hands, would occasionally stop to wrap up something in a bit of paper, and would come back again calling 'Hi!'

He would look round surprised.'Me?' he would say, with a smile.

By this time the collegian would be up with him, and he would paternally add, 'What have you forgotten? What can I do for you?'

'I forgot to leave this,' the collegian would usually return, 'for the Father of the Marshalsea.'

'My good sir,' he would rejoin, 'he is infinitely obliged to you.' But, to the last, the irresolute hand of old would remain

in the pocket into which he had slipped the money during two or three turns about the yard, lest the transaction should be too conspicuous to the general body of collegians.

One afternoon he had been doing the honours of the place to a rather large party of collegians, who happened to be going out, when, as he was coming back, he encountered one from the poor side who had been taken in execution for a small sum a week before, had 'settled' in the course of that afternoon, and was going out too. The man was a mere Plasterer in his working dress; had his wife with him, and a bundle; and was in high spirits.

'God bless you, sir,' he said in passing.

'And you,' benignantly returned the Father of the Marshalsea.

They were pretty far divided, going their several ways, when the Plasterer called out, 'I say! – sir!' and came back to him.

'It ain't much,' said the Plasterer, putting a little pile of halfpence in his hand, 'but it's well meant.'

The Father of the Marshalsea had never been offered tribute in copper yet. His children often had, and with his perfect acquiescence it had gone into the common purse to buy meat that he had eaten, and drink that he had drunk; but fustian splashed with white lime, bestowing halfpence on him, front to front, was new.

'How dare you!' he said to the man, and feebly burst into tears.

The Plasterer turned him towards the wall, that his face might not be seen; and the action was so delicate, and the man was so penetrated with repentance, and asked pardon so honestly, that

he could make him no less acknowledgment than, ‘I know you meant it kindly. Say no more.’

‘Bless your soul, sir,’ urged the Plasterer, ‘I did indeed. I’d do more by you than the rest of ‘em do, I fancy.’

‘What would you do?’ he asked.

‘I’d come back to see you, after I was let out.’

‘Give me the money again,’ said the other, eagerly, ‘and I’ll keep it, and never spend it. Thank you for it, thank you! I shall see you again?’

‘If I live a week you shall.’

They shook hands and parted. The collegians, assembled in Symposium in the Snuggery that night, marvelled what had happened to their Father; he walked so late in the shadows of the yard, and seemed so downcast.

CHAPTER 7. The Child of the Marshalsea

The baby whose first draught of air had been tinctured with Doctor Haggage's brandy, was handed down among the generations of collegians, like the tradition of their common parent. In the earlier stages of her existence, she was handed down in a literal and prosaic sense; it being almost a part of the entrance footing of every new collegian to nurse the child who had been born in the college.

'By rights,' remarked the turnkey when she was first shown to him, 'I ought to be her godfather.'

The debtor irresolutely thought of it for a minute, and said, 'Perhaps you wouldn't object to really being her godfather?'

'Oh! *I* don't object,' replied the turnkey, 'if you don't.'

Thus it came to pass that she was christened one Sunday afternoon, when the turnkey, being relieved, was off the lock; and that the turnkey went up to the font of Saint George's Church, and promised and vowed and renounced on her behalf, as he himself related when he came back, 'like a good 'un.'

This invested the turnkey with a new proprietary share in the child, over and above his former official one. When she began to walk and talk, he became fond of her; bought a little arm-chair and stood it by the high fender of the lodge fire-place; liked to have her company when he was on the lock; and used to bribe her

with cheap toys to come and talk to him. The child, for her part, soon grew so fond of the turnkey that she would come climbing up the lodge-steps of her own accord at all hours of the day. When she fell asleep in the little armchair by the high fender, the turnkey would cover her with his pocket-handkerchief; and when she sat in it dressing and undressing a doll which soon came to be unlike dolls on the other side of the lock, and to bear a horrible family resemblance to Mrs Bangham – he would contemplate her from the top of his stool with exceeding gentleness. Witnessing these things, the collegians would express an opinion that the turnkey, who was a bachelor, had been cut out by nature for a family man. But the turnkey thanked them, and said, 'No, on the whole it was enough to see other people's children there.'

At what period of her early life the little creature began to perceive that it was not the habit of all the world to live locked up in narrow yards surrounded by high walls with spikes at the top, would be a difficult question to settle. But she was a very, very little creature indeed, when she had somehow gained the knowledge that her clasp of her father's hand was to be always loosened at the door which the great key opened; and that while her own light steps were free to pass beyond it, his feet must never cross that line. A pitiful and plaintive look, with which she had begun to regard him when she was still extremely young, was perhaps a part of this discovery.

With a pitiful and plaintive look for everything, indeed, but with something in it for only him that was like protection, this

Child of the Marshalsea and the child of the Father of the Marshalsea, sat by her friend the turnkey in the lodge, kept the family room, or wandered about the prison-yard, for the first eight years of her life. With a pitiful and plaintive look for her wayward sister; for her idle brother; for the high blank walls; for the faded crowd they shut in; for the games of the prison children as they whooped and ran, and played at hide-and-seek, and made the iron bars of the inner gateway 'Home.'

Wistful and wondering, she would sit in summer weather by the high fender in the lodge, looking up at the sky through the barred window, until, when she turned her eyes away, bars of light would arise between her and her friend, and she would see him through a grating, too.

'Thinking of the fields,' the turnkey said once, after watching her, 'ain't you?'

'Where are they?' she inquired.

'Why, they're – over there, my dear,' said the turnkey, with a vague flourish of his key. 'Just about there.'

'Does anybody open them, and shut them? Are they locked?'

The turnkey was discomfited. 'Well,' he said. 'Not in general.'

'Are they very pretty, Bob?' She called him Bob, by his own particular request and instruction.

'Lovely. Full of flowers. There's buttercups, and there's daisies, and there's' – the turnkey hesitated, being short of floral nomenclature – 'there's dandelions, and all manner of games.'

'Is it very pleasant to be there, Bob?'

‘Prime,’ said the turnkey.

‘Was father ever there?’

‘Hem!’ coughed the turnkey. ‘O yes, he was there, sometimes.’

‘Is he sorry not to be there now?’

‘N-not particular,’ said the turnkey.

‘Nor any of the people?’ she asked, glancing at the listless crowd within. ‘O are you quite sure and certain, Bob?’

At this difficult point of the conversation Bob gave in, and changed the subject to hard-bake: always his last resource when he found his little friend getting him into a political, social, or theological corner. But this was the origin of a series of Sunday excursions that these two curious companions made together. They used to issue from the lodge on alternate Sunday afternoons with great gravity, bound for some meadows or green lanes that had been elaborately appointed by the turnkey in the course of the week; and there she picked grass and flowers to bring home, while he smoked his pipe. Afterwards, there were tea-gardens, shrimps, ale, and other delicacies; and then they would come back hand in hand, unless she was more than usually tired, and had fallen asleep on his shoulder.

In those early days, the turnkey first began profoundly to consider a question which cost him so much mental labour, that it remained undetermined on the day of his death. He decided to will and bequeath his little property of savings to his godchild, and the point arose how could it be so ‘tied up’ as that only she should have the benefit of it? His experience on the lock gave

him such an acute perception of the enormous difficulty of 'tying up' money with any approach to tightness, and contrariwise of the remarkable ease with which it got loose, that through a series of years he regularly propounded this knotty point to every new insolvent agent and other professional gentleman who passed in and out.

'Supposing,' he would say, stating the case with his key on the professional gentleman's waistcoat; 'supposing a man wanted to leave his property to a young female, and wanted to tie it up so that nobody else should ever be able to make a grab at it; how would you tie up that property?'

'Settle it strictly on herself,' the professional gentleman would complacently answer.

'But look here,' quoth the turnkey. 'Supposing she had, say a brother, say a father, say a husband, who would be likely to make a grab at that property when she came into it – how about that?'

'It would be settled on herself, and they would have no more legal claim on it than you,' would be the professional answer.

'Stop a bit,' said the turnkey. 'Supposing she was tender-hearted, and they came over her. Where's your law for tying it up then?'

The deepest character whom the turnkey sounded, was unable to produce his law for tying such a knot as that. So, the turnkey thought about it all his life, and died intestate after all.

But that was long afterwards, when his god-daughter was past sixteen. The first half of that space of her life was only just

accomplished, when her pitiful and plaintive look saw her father a widower. From that time the protection that her wondering eyes had expressed towards him, became embodied in action, and the Child of the Marshalsea took upon herself a new relation towards the Father.

At first, such a baby could do little more than sit with him, deserting her livelier place by the high fender, and quietly watching him. But this made her so far necessary to him that he became accustomed to her, and began to be sensible of missing her when she was not there. Through this little gate, she passed out of childhood into the care-laden world.

What her pitiful look saw, at that early time, in her father, in her sister, in her brother, in the jail; how much, or how little of the wretched truth it pleased God to make visible to her; lies hidden with many mysteries. It is enough that she was inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest. Inspired? Yes. Shall we speak of the inspiration of a poet or a priest, and not of the heart impelled by love and self-devotion to the lowliest work in the lowliest way of life!

With no earthly friend to help her, or so much as to see her, but the one so strangely assorted; with no knowledge even of the common daily tone and habits of the common members of the free community who are not shut up in prisons; born and bred in a social condition, false even with a reference to the falsest condition outside the walls; drinking from infancy

of a well whose waters had their own peculiar stain, their own unwholesome and unnatural taste; the Child of the Marshalsea began her womanly life.

No matter through what mistakes and discouragements, what ridicule (not unkindly meant, but deeply felt) of her youth and little figure, what humble consciousness of her own babyhood and want of strength, even in the matter of lifting and carrying; through how much weariness and hopelessness, and how many secret tears; she drudged on, until recognised as useful, even indispensable. That time came. She took the place of eldest of the three, in all things but precedence; was the head of the fallen family; and bore, in her own heart, its anxieties and shames.

At thirteen, she could read and keep accounts, that is, could put down in words and figures how much the bare necessaries that they wanted would cost, and how much less they had to buy them with. She had been, by snatches of a few weeks at a time, to an evening school outside, and got her sister and brother sent to day-schools by desultory starts, during three or four years. There was no instruction for any of them at home; but she knew well – no one better – that a man so broken as to be the Father of the Marshalsea, could be no father to his own children.

To these scanty means of improvement, she added another of her own contriving. Once, among the heterogeneous crowd of inmates there appeared a dancing-master. Her sister had a great desire to learn the dancing-master's art, and seemed to have a taste that way. At thirteen years old, the Child of the Marshalsea

presented herself to the dancing-master, with a little bag in her hand, and preferred her humble petition.

'If you please, I was born here, sir.'

'Oh! You are the young lady, are you?' said the dancing-master, surveying the small figure and uplifted face.

'Yes, sir.'

'And what can I do for you?' said the dancing-master.

'Nothing for me, sir, thank you,' anxiously undrawing the strings of the little bag; 'but if, while you stay here, you could be so kind as to teach my sister cheap – '

'My child, I'll teach her for nothing,' said the dancing-master, shutting up the bag. He was as good-natured a dancing-master as ever danced to the Insolvent Court, and he kept his word. The sister was so apt a pupil, and the dancing-master had such abundant leisure to bestow upon her (for it took him a matter of ten weeks to set to his creditors, lead off, turn the Commissioners, and right and left back to his professional pursuits), that wonderful progress was made. Indeed the dancing-master was so proud of it, and so wishful to display it before he left to a few select friends among the collegians, that at six o'clock on a certain fine morning, a minuet de la cour came off in the yard – the college-rooms being of too confined proportions for the purpose – in which so much ground was covered, and the steps were so conscientiously executed, that the dancing-master, having to play the kit besides, was thoroughly blown.

The success of this beginning, which led to the dancing-

master's continuing his instruction after his release, emboldened the poor child to try again. She watched and waited months for a seamstress. In the fulness of time a milliner came in, and to her she repaired on her own behalf.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' she said, looking timidly round the door of the milliner, whom she found in tears and in bed: 'but I was born here.'

Everybody seemed to hear of her as soon as they arrived; for the milliner sat up in bed, drying her eyes, and said, just as the dancing-master had said:

'Oh! *You* are the child, are you?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'I am sorry I haven't got anything for you,' said the milliner, shaking her head.

'It's not that, ma'am. If you please I want to learn needle-work.'

'Why should you do that,' returned the milliner, 'with me before you? It has not done me much good.'

'Nothing – whatever it is – seems to have done anybody much good who comes here,' she returned in all simplicity; 'but I want to learn just the same.'

'I am afraid you are so weak, you see,' the milliner objected.

'I don't think I am weak, ma'am.'

'And you are so very, very little, you see,' the milliner objected.

'Yes, I am afraid I am very little indeed,' returned the Child of

the Marshalsea; and so began to sob over that unfortunate defect of hers, which came so often in her way. The milliner – who was not morose or hard-hearted, only newly insolvent – was touched, took her in hand with goodwill, found her the most patient and earnest of pupils, and made her a cunning work-woman in course of time.

In course of time, and in the very self-same course of time, the Father of the Marshalsea gradually developed a new flower of character. The more Fatherly he grew as to the Marshalsea, and the more dependent he became on the contributions of his changing family, the greater stand he made by his forlorn gentility. With the same hand that he pocketed a collegian's half-crown half an hour ago, he would wipe away the tears that streamed over his cheeks if any reference were made to his daughters' earning their bread. So, over and above other daily cares, the Child of the Marshalsea had always upon her the care of preserving the genteel fiction that they were all idle beggars together.

The sister became a dancer. There was a ruined uncle in the family group – ruined by his brother, the Father of the Marshalsea, and knowing no more how than his ruiner did, but accepting the fact as an inevitable certainty – on whom her protection devolved. Naturally a retired and simple man, he had shown no particular sense of being ruined at the time when that calamity fell upon him, further than that he left off washing himself when the shock was announced, and never took to that

luxury any more. He had been a very indifferent musical amateur in his better days; and when he fell with his brother, resorted for support to playing a clarionet as dirty as himself in a small Theatre Orchestra. It was the theatre in which his niece became a dancer; he had been a fixture there a long time when she took her poor station in it; and he accepted the task of serving as her escort and guardian, just as he would have accepted an illness, a legacy, a feast, starvation – anything but soap.

To enable this girl to earn her few weekly shillings, it was necessary for the Child of the Marshalsea to go through an elaborate form with the Father.

'Fanny is not going to live with us just now, father. She will be here a good deal in the day, but she is going to live outside with uncle.'

'You surprise me. Why?'

'I think uncle wants a companion, father. He should be attended to, and looked after.'

'A companion? He passes much of his time here. And you attend to him and look after him, Amy, a great deal more than ever your sister will. You all go out so much; you all go out so much.'

This was to keep up the ceremony and pretence of his having no idea that Amy herself went out by the day to work.

'But we are always glad to come home, father; now, are we not? And as to Fanny, perhaps besides keeping uncle company and taking care of him, it may be as well for her not quite to live

here, always. She was not born here as I was, you know, father.'

'Well, Amy, well. I don't quite follow you, but it's natural I suppose that Fanny should prefer to be outside, and even that you often should, too. So, you and Fanny and your uncle, my dear, shall have your own way. Good, good. I'll not meddle; don't mind me.'

To get her brother out of the prison; out of the succession to Mrs Bangham in executing commissions, and out of the slang interchange with very doubtful companions consequent upon both; was her hardest task. At eighteen he would have dragged on from hand to mouth, from hour to hour, from penny to penny, until eighty. Nobody got into the prison from whom he derived anything useful or good, and she could find no patron for him but her old friend and godfather.

'Dear Bob,' said she, 'what is to become of poor Tip?' His name was Edward, and Ted had been transformed into Tip, within the walls.

The turnkey had strong private opinions as to what would become of poor Tip, and had even gone so far with the view of averting their fulfilment, as to sound Tip in reference to the expediency of running away and going to serve his country. But Tip had thanked him, and said he didn't seem to care for his country.

'Well, my dear,' said the turnkey, 'something ought to be done with him. Suppose I try and get him into the law?'

'That would be so good of you, Bob!'

The turnkey had now two points to put to the professional gentlemen as they passed in and out. He put this second one so perseveringly that a stool and twelve shillings a week were at last found for Tip in the office of an attorney in a great National Palladium called the Palace Court; at that time one of a considerable list of everlasting bulwarks to the dignity and safety of Albion, whose places know them no more.

Tip languished in Clifford's Inns for six months, and at the expiration of that term sauntered back one evening with his hands in his pockets, and incidentally observed to his sister that he was not going back again.

'Not going back again?' said the poor little anxious Child of the Marshalsea, always calculating and planning for Tip, in the front rank of her charges.

'I am so tired of it,' said Tip, 'that I have cut it.'

Tip tired of everything. With intervals of Marshalsea lounging, and Mrs Bangham succession, his small second mother, aided by her trusty friend, got him into a warehouse, into a market garden, into the hop trade, into the law again, into an auctioneers, into a brewery, into a stockbroker's, into the law again, into a coach office, into a waggon office, into the law again, into a general dealer's, into a distillery, into the law again, into a wool house, into a dry goods house, into the Billingsgate trade, into the foreign fruit trade, and into the docks. But whatever Tip went into, he came out of tired, announcing that he had cut it. Wherever he went, this foredoomed Tip

appeared to take the prison walls with him, and to set them up in such trade or calling; and to prowl about within their narrow limits in the old slip-shod, purposeless, down-at-heel way; until the real immovable Marshalsea walls asserted their fascination over him, and brought him back.

Nevertheless, the brave little creature did so fix her heart on her brother's rescue, that while he was ringing out these doleful changes, she pinched and scraped enough together to ship him for Canada. When he was tired of nothing to do, and disposed in its turn to cut even that, he graciously consented to go to Canada. And there was grief in her bosom over parting with him, and joy in the hope of his being put in a straight course at last.

'God bless you, dear Tip. Don't be too proud to come and see us, when you have made your fortune.'

'All right!' said Tip, and went.

But not all the way to Canada; in fact, not further than Liverpool. After making the voyage to that port from London, he found himself so strongly impelled to cut the vessel, that he resolved to walk back again. Carrying out which intention, he presented himself before her at the expiration of a month, in rags, without shoes, and much more tired than ever.

At length, after another interval of successorship to Mrs Bangham, he found a pursuit for himself, and announced it.

'Amy, I have got a situation.'

'Have you really and truly, Tip?'

'All right. I shall do now. You needn't look anxious about me

any more, old girl.'

'What is it, Tip?'

'Why, you know Slingo by sight?'

'Not the man they call the dealer?'

'That's the chap. He'll be out on Monday, and he's going to give me a berth.'

'What is he a dealer in, Tip?'

'Horses. All right! I shall do now, Amy.'

She lost sight of him for months afterwards, and only heard from him once. A whisper passed among the elder collegians that he had been seen at a mock auction in Moorfields, pretending to buy plated articles for massive silver, and paying for them with the greatest liberality in bank notes; but it never reached her ears. One evening she was alone at work – standing up at the window, to save the twilight lingering above the wall – when he opened the door and walked in.

She kissed and welcomed him; but was afraid to ask him any questions. He saw how anxious and timid she was, and appeared sorry.

'I am afraid, Amy, you'll be vexed this time. Upon my life I am!'

'I am very sorry to hear you say so, Tip. Have you come back?'

'Why – yes.'

'Not expecting this time that what you had found would answer very well, I am less surprised and sorry than I might have been, Tip.'

‘Ah! But that’s not the worst of it.’

‘Not the worst of it?’

‘Don’t look so startled. No, Amy, not the worst of it. I have come back, you see; but —*don’t* look so startled – I have come back in what I may call a new way. I am off the volunteer list altogether. I am in now, as one of the regulars.’

‘Oh! Don’t say you are a prisoner, Tip! Don’t, don’t!’

‘Well, I don’t want to say it,’ he returned in a reluctant tone; ‘but if you can’t understand me without my saying it, what am I to do? I am in for forty pound odd.’

For the first time in all those years, she sunk under her cares. She cried, with her clasped hands lifted above her head, that it would kill their father if he ever knew it; and fell down at Tip’s graceless feet.

It was easier for Tip to bring her to her senses than for her to bring *him* to understand that the Father of the Marshalsea would be beside himself if he knew the truth. The thing was incomprehensible to Tip, and altogether a fanciful notion. He yielded to it in that light only, when he submitted to her entreaties, backed by those of his uncle and sister. There was no want of precedent for his return; it was accounted for to the father in the usual way; and the collegians, with a better comprehension of the pious fraud than Tip, supported it loyally.

This was the life, and this the history, of the child of the Marshalsea at twenty-two. With a still surviving attachment to the one miserable yard and block of houses as her birthplace and

home, she passed to and fro in it shrinkingly now, with a womanly consciousness that she was pointed out to every one. Since she had begun to work beyond the walls, she had found it necessary to conceal where she lived, and to come and go as secretly as she could, between the free city and the iron gates, outside of which she had never slept in her life. Her original timidity had grown with this concealment, and her light step and her little figure shunned the thronged streets while they passed along them.

Worldly wise in hard and poor necessities, she was innocent in all things else. Innocent, in the mist through which she saw her father, and the prison, and the turbid living river that flowed through it and flowed on.

This was the life, and this the history, of Little Dorrit; now going home upon a dull September evening, observed at a distance by Arthur Clennam. This was the life, and this the history, of Little Dorrit; turning at the end of London Bridge, recrossing it, going back again, passing on to Saint George's Church, turning back suddenly once more, and flitting in at the open outer gate and little court-yard of the Marshalsea.

CHAPTER 8. The Lock

Arthur Clennam stood in the street, waiting to ask some passer-by what place that was. He suffered a few people to pass him in whose face there was no encouragement to make the inquiry, and still stood pausing in the street, when an old man came up and turned into the courtyard.

He stooped a good deal, and plodded along in a slow pre-occupied manner, which made the bustling London thoroughfares no very safe resort for him. He was dirtily and meanly dressed, in a threadbare coat, once blue, reaching to his ankles and buttoned to his chin, where it vanished in the pale ghost of a velvet collar. A piece of red cloth with which that phantom had been stiffened in its lifetime was now laid bare, and poked itself up, at the back of the old man's neck, into a confusion of grey hair and rusty stock and buckle which altogether nearly poked his hat off. A greasy hat it was, and a napless; impending over his eyes, cracked and crumpled at the brim, and with a wisp of pocket-handkerchief dangling out below it. His trousers were so long and loose, and his shoes so clumsy and large, that he shuffled like an elephant; though how much of this was gait, and how much trailing cloth and leather, no one could have told. Under one arm he carried a limp and worn-out case, containing some wind instrument; in the same hand he had a pennyworth of snuff in a little packet of whitey-brown paper,

from which he slowly comforted his poor blue old nose with a lengthened-out pinch, as Arthur Clennam looked at him.

To this old man crossing the court-yard, he preferred his inquiry, touching him on the shoulder. The old man stopped and looked round, with the expression in his weak grey eyes of one whose thoughts had been far off, and who was a little dull of hearing also.

'Pray, sir,' said Arthur, repeating his question, 'what is this place?'

'Ay! This place?' returned the old man, staying his pinch of snuff on its road, and pointing at the place without looking at it. 'This is the Marshalsea, sir.'

'The debtors' prison?'

'Sir,' said the old man, with the air of deeming it not quite necessary to insist upon that designation, 'the debtors' prison.'

He turned himself about, and went on.

'I beg your pardon,' said Arthur, stopping him once more, 'but will you allow me to ask you another question? Can any one go in here?'

'Any one can *go in*,' replied the old man; plainly adding by the significance of his emphasis, 'but it is not every one who can go out.'

'Pardon me once more. Are you familiar with the place?'

'Sir,' returned the old man, squeezing his little packet of snuff in his hand, and turning upon his interrogator as if such questions hurt him. 'I am.'

‘I beg you to excuse me. I am not impertinently curious, but have a good object. Do you know the name of Dorrit here?’

‘My name, sir,’ replied the old man most unexpectedly, ‘is Dorrit.’

Arthur pulled off his hat to him. ‘Grant me the favour of half-a-dozen words. I was wholly unprepared for your announcement, and hope that assurance is my sufficient apology for having taken the liberty of addressing you. I have recently come home to England after a long absence. I have seen at my mother’s – Mrs Clennam in the city – a young woman working at her needle, whom I have only heard addressed or spoken of as Little Dorrit. I have felt sincerely interested in her, and have had a great desire to know something more about her. I saw her, not a minute before you came up, pass in at that door.’

The old man looked at him attentively. ‘Are you a sailor, sir?’ he asked. He seemed a little disappointed by the shake of the head that replied to him. ‘Not a sailor? I judged from your sunburnt face that you might be. Are you in earnest, sir?’

‘I do assure you that I am, and do entreat you to believe that I am, in plain earnest.’

‘I know very little of the world, sir,’ returned the other, who had a weak and quavering voice. ‘I am merely passing on, like the shadow over the sun-dial. It would be worth no man’s while to mislead me; it would really be too easy – too poor a success, to yield any satisfaction. The young woman whom you saw go in here is my brother’s child. My brother is William Dorrit; I am

Frederick. You say you have seen her at your mother's (I know your mother befriends her), you have felt an interest in her, and you wish to know what she does here. Come and see.'

He went on again, and Arthur accompanied him.

'My brother,' said the old man, pausing on the step and slowly facing round again, 'has been here many years; and much that happens even among ourselves, out of doors, is kept from him for reasons that I needn't enter upon now. Be so good as to say nothing of my niece's working at her needle. Be so good as to say nothing that goes beyond what is said among us. If you keep within our bounds, you cannot well be wrong. Now! Come and see.'

Arthur followed him down a narrow entry, at the end of which a key was turned, and a strong door was opened from within. It admitted them into a lodge or lobby, across which they passed, and so through another door and a grating into the prison. The old man always plodding on before, turned round, in his slow, stiff, stooping manner, when they came to the turnkey on duty, as if to present his companion. The turnkey nodded; and the companion passed in without being asked whom he wanted.

The night was dark; and the prison lamps in the yard, and the candles in the prison windows faintly shining behind many sorts of wry old curtain and blind, had not the air of making it lighter. A few people loitered about, but the greater part of the population was within doors. The old man, taking the right-hand side of the yard, turned in at the third or fourth doorway, and

began to ascend the stairs. 'They are rather dark, sir, but you will not find anything in the way.'

He paused for a moment before opening a door on the second story. He had no sooner turned the handle than the visitor saw Little Dorrit, and saw the reason of her setting so much store by dining alone.

She had brought the meat home that she should have eaten herself, and was already warming it on a gridiron over the fire for her father, clad in an old grey gown and a black cap, awaiting his supper at the table. A clean cloth was spread before him, with knife, fork, and spoon, salt-cellar, pepper-box, glass, and pewter ale-pot. Such zests as his particular little phial of cayenne pepper and his pennyworth of pickles in a saucer, were not wanting.

She started, coloured deeply, and turned white. The visitor, more with his eyes than by the slight impulsive motion of his hand, entreated her to be reassured and to trust him.

'I found this gentleman,' said the uncle – 'Mr Clennam, William, son of Amy's friend – at the outer gate, wishful, as he was going by, of paying his respects, but hesitating whether to come in or not. This is my brother William, sir.'

'I hope,' said Arthur, very doubtful what to say, 'that my respect for your daughter may explain and justify my desire to be presented to you, sir.'

'Mr Clennam,' returned the other, rising, taking his cap off in the flat of his hand, and so holding it, ready to put on again, 'you do me honour. You are welcome, sir;' with a low bow. 'Frederick,

a chair. Pray sit down, Mr Clennam.'

He put his black cap on again as he had taken it off, and resumed his own seat. There was a wonderful air of benignity and patronage in his manner. These were the ceremonies with which he received the collegians.

'You are welcome to the Marshalsea, sir. I have welcomed many gentlemen to these walls. Perhaps you are aware – my daughter Amy may have mentioned that I am the Father of this place.'

'I – so I have understood,' said Arthur, dashing at the assertion.

'You know, I dare say, that my daughter Amy was born here. A good girl, sir, a dear girl, and long a comfort and support to me. Amy, my dear, put this dish on; Mr Clennam will excuse the primitive customs to which we are reduced here. Is it a compliment to ask you if you would do me the honour, sir, to – '

'Thank you,' returned Arthur. 'Not a morsel.'

He felt himself quite lost in wonder at the manner of the man, and that the probability of his daughter's having had a reserve as to her family history, should be so far out of his mind.

She filled his glass, put all the little matters on the table ready to his hand, and then sat beside him while he ate his supper. Evidently in observance of their nightly custom, she put some bread before herself, and touched his glass with her lips; but Arthur saw she was troubled and took nothing. Her look at her father, half admiring him and proud of him, half ashamed for him, all devoted and loving, went to his inmost heart.

The Father of the Marshalsea condescended towards his brother as an amiable, well-meaning man; a private character, who had not arrived at distinction. 'Frederick,' said he, 'you and Fanny sup at your lodgings to-night, I know. What have you done with Fanny, Frederick?'

'She is walking with Tip.'

'Tip – as you may know – is my son, Mr Clennam. He has been a little wild, and difficult to settle, but his introduction to the world was rather' – he shrugged his shoulders with a faint sigh, and looked round the room – 'a little adverse. Your first visit here, sir?'

'My first.'

'You could hardly have been here since your boyhood without my knowledge. It very seldom happens that anybody – of any pretensions – any pretensions – comes here without being presented to me.'

'As many as forty or fifty in a day have been introduced to my brother,' said Frederick, faintly lighting up with a ray of pride.

'Yes!' the Father of the Marshalsea assented. 'We have even exceeded that number. On a fine Sunday in term time, it is quite a Levee – quite a Levee. Amy, my dear, I have been trying half the day to remember the name of the gentleman from Camberwell who was introduced to me last Christmas week by that agreeable coal-merchant who was remanded for six months.'

'I don't remember his name, father.'

'Frederick, do *you* remember his name?'

Frederick doubted if he had ever heard it. No one could doubt that Frederick was the last person upon earth to put such a question to, with any hope of information.

'I mean,' said his brother, 'the gentleman who did that handsome action with so much delicacy. Ha! Tush! The name has quite escaped me. Mr Clennam, as I have happened to mention handsome and delicate action, you may like, perhaps, to know what it was.'

'Very much,' said Arthur, withdrawing his eyes from the delicate head beginning to droop and the pale face with a new solicitude stealing over it.

'It is so generous, and shows so much fine feeling, that it is almost a duty to mention it. I said at the time that I always would mention it on every suitable occasion, without regard to personal sensitiveness. A – well – a – it's of no use to disguise the fact – you must know, Mr Clennam, that it does sometimes occur that people who come here desire to offer some little – Testimonial – to the Father of the place.'

To see her hand upon his arm in mute entreaty half-repressed, and her timid little shrinking figure turning away, was to see a sad, sad sight.

'Sometimes,' he went on in a low, soft voice, agitated, and clearing his throat every now and then; 'sometimes – hem – it takes one shape and sometimes another; but it is generally – ha – Money. And it is, I cannot but confess it, it is too often – hem – acceptable. This gentleman that I refer to, was presented to

me, Mr Clennam, in a manner highly gratifying to my feelings, and conversed not only with great politeness, but with great – ahem – information.' All this time, though he had finished his supper, he was nervously going about his plate with his knife and fork, as if some of it were still before him. 'It appeared from his conversation that he had a garden, though he was delicate of mentioning it at first, as gardens are – hem – are not accessible to me. But it came out, through my admiring a very fine cluster of geranium – beautiful cluster of geranium to be sure – which he had brought from his conservatory. On my taking notice of its rich colour, he showed me a piece of paper round it, on which was written, "For the Father of the Marshalsea," and presented it to me. But this was – hem – not all. He made a particular request, on taking leave, that I would remove the paper in half an hour. I – ha – I did so; and I found that it contained – ahem – two guineas. I assure you, Mr Clennam, I have received – hem – Testimonials in many ways, and of many degrees of value, and they have always been – ha – unfortunately acceptable; but I never was more pleased than with this – ahem – this particular Testimonial.'

Arthur was in the act of saying the little he could say on such a theme, when a bell began to ring, and footsteps approached the door. A pretty girl of a far better figure and much more developed than Little Dorrit, though looking much younger in the face when the two were observed together, stopped in the doorway on seeing a stranger; and a young man who was with

her, stopped too.

'Mr Clennam, Fanny. My eldest daughter and my son, Mr Clennam. The bell is a signal for visitors to retire, and so they have come to say good night; but there is plenty of time, plenty of time. Girls, Mr Clennam will excuse any household business you may have together. He knows, I dare say, that I have but one room here.'

'I only want my clean dress from Amy, father,' said the second girl.

'And I my clothes,' said Tip.

Amy opened a drawer in an old piece of furniture that was a chest of drawers above and a bedstead below, and produced two little bundles, which she handed to her brother and sister. 'Mended and made up?' Clennam heard the sister ask in a whisper. To which Amy answered 'Yes.' He had risen now, and took the opportunity of glancing round the room. The bare walls had been coloured green, evidently by an unskilled hand, and were poorly decorated with a few prints. The window was curtained, and the floor carpeted; and there were shelves and pegs, and other such conveniences, that had accumulated in the course of years. It was a close, confined room, poorly furnished; and the chimney smoked to boot, or the tin screen at the top of the fireplace was superfluous; but constant pains and care had made it neat, and even, after its kind, comfortable.

All the while the bell was ringing, and the uncle was anxious to go. 'Come, Fanny, come, Fanny,' he said, with his ragged

clarionet case under his arm; 'the lock, child, the lock!'

Fanny bade her father good night, and whisked off airily. Tip had already clattered down-stairs. 'Now, Mr Clennam,' said the uncle, looking back as he shuffled out after them, 'the lock, sir, the lock.'

Mr Clennam had two things to do before he followed; one, to offer his testimonial to the Father of the Marshalsea, without giving pain to his child; the other to say something to that child, though it were but a word, in explanation of his having come there.

'Allow me,' said the Father, 'to see you down-stairs.'

She had slipped out after the rest, and they were alone. 'Not on any account,' said the visitor, hurriedly. 'Pray allow me to – ' chink, chink, chink.

'Mr Clennam,' said the Father, 'I am deeply, deeply – ' But his visitor had shut up his hand to stop the clinking, and had gone down-stairs with great speed.

He saw no Little Dorrit on his way down, or in the yard. The last two or three stragglers were hurrying to the lodge, and he was following, when he caught sight of her in the doorway of the first house from the entrance. He turned back hastily.

'Pray forgive me,' he said, 'for speaking to you here; pray forgive me for coming here at all! I followed you to-night. I did so, that I might endeavour to render you and your family some service. You know the terms on which I and my mother are, and may not be surprised that I have preserved our distant relations

at her house, lest I should unintentionally make her jealous, or resentful, or do you any injury in her estimation. What I have seen here, in this short time, has greatly increased my heartfelt wish to be a friend to you. It would recompense me for much disappointment if I could hope to gain your confidence.'

She was scared at first, but seemed to take courage while he spoke to her.

'You are very good, sir. You speak very earnestly to me. But I – but I wish you had not watched me.'

He understood the emotion with which she said it, to arise in her father's behalf; and he respected it, and was silent.

'Mrs Clennam has been of great service to me; I don't know what we should have done without the employment she has given me; I am afraid it may not be a good return to become secret with her; I can say no more to-night, sir. I am sure you mean to be kind to us. Thank you, thank you.'

'Let me ask you one question before I leave. Have you known my mother long?'

'I think two years, sir, – The bell has stopped.'

'How did you know her first? Did she send here for you?'

'No. She does not even know that I live here. We have a friend, father and I – a poor labouring man, but the best of friends – and I wrote out that I wished to do needlework, and gave his address. And he got what I wrote out displayed at a few places where it cost nothing, and Mrs Clennam found me that way, and sent for me. The gate will be locked, sir!'

She was so tremulous and agitated, and he was so moved by compassion for her, and by deep interest in her story as it dawned upon him, that he could scarcely tear himself away. But the stoppage of the bell, and the quiet in the prison, were a warning to depart; and with a few hurried words of kindness he left her gliding back to her father.

But he remained too late. The inner gate was locked, and the lodge closed. After a little fruitless knocking with his hand, he was standing there with the disagreeable conviction upon him that he had got to get through the night, when a voice accosted him from behind.

'Caught, eh?' said the voice. 'You won't go home till morning. Oh! It's you, is it, Mr Clennam?'

The voice was Tip's; and they stood looking at one another in the prison-yard, as it began to rain.

'You've done it,' observed Tip; 'you must be sharper than that next time.'

'But you are locked in too,' said Arthur.

'I believe I am!' said Tip, sarcastically. 'About! But not in your way. I belong to the shop, only my sister has a theory that our governor must never know it. I don't see why, myself.'

'Can I get any shelter?' asked Arthur. 'What had I better do?'

'We had better get hold of Amy first of all,' said Tip, referring any difficulty to her as a matter of course.

'I would rather walk about all night – it's not much to do – than give that trouble.'

‘You needn’t do that, if you don’t mind paying for a bed. If you don’t mind paying, they’ll make you up one on the Snuggery table, under the circumstances. If you’ll come along, I’ll introduce you there.’

As they passed down the yard, Arthur looked up at the window of the room he had lately left, where the light was still burning. ‘Yes, sir,’ said Tip, following his glance. ‘That’s the governor’s. She’ll sit with him for another hour reading yesterday’s paper to him, or something of that sort; and then she’ll come out like a little ghost, and vanish away without a sound.’

‘I don’t understand you.’

‘The governor sleeps up in the room, and she has a lodging at the turnkey’s. First house there,’ said Tip, pointing out the doorway into which she had retired. ‘First house, sky parlour. She pays twice as much for it as she would for one twice as good outside. But she stands by the governor, poor dear girl, day and night.’

This brought them to the tavern-establishment at the upper end of the prison, where the collegians had just vacated their social evening club. The apartment on the ground-floor in which it was held, was the Snuggery in question; the presidential tribune of the chairman, the pewter-pots, glasses, pipes, tobacco-ashes, and general flavour of members, were still as that convivial institution had left them on its adjournment. The Snuggery had two of the qualities popularly held to be essential to grog for ladies, in respect that it was hot and strong; but in the third point

of analogy, requiring plenty of it, the Snuggery was defective; being but a cooped-up apartment.

The unaccustomed visitor from outside, naturally assumed everybody here to be prisoners – landlord, waiter, barmaid, potboy, and all. Whether they were or not, did not appear; but they all had a weedy look. The keeper of a chandler's shop in a front parlour, who took in gentlemen boarders, lent his assistance in making the bed. He had been a tailor in his time, and had kept a phaeton, he said. He boasted that he stood up litigiously for the interests of the college; and he had undefined and undefinable ideas that the marshal intercepted a 'Fund,' which ought to come to the collegians. He liked to believe this, and always impressed the shadowy grievance on new-comers and strangers; though he could not, for his life, have explained what Fund he meant, or how the notion had got rooted in his soul. He had fully convinced himself, notwithstanding, that his own proper share of the Fund was three and ninepence a week; and that in this amount he, as an individual collegian, was swindled by the marshal, regularly every Monday. Apparently, he helped to make the bed, that he might not lose an opportunity of stating this case; after which unloading of his mind, and after announcing (as it seemed he always did, without anything coming of it) that he was going to write a letter to the papers and show the marshal up, he fell into miscellaneous conversation with the rest. It was evident from the general tone of the whole party, that they had come to regard insolvency as the normal state of mankind, and the payment of

debts as a disease that occasionally broke out.

In this strange scene, and with these strange spectres flitting about him, Arthur Clennam looked on at the preparations as if they were part of a dream. Pending which, the long-initiated Tip, with an awful enjoyment of the Snuggery's resources, pointed out the common kitchen fire maintained by subscription of collegians, the boiler for hot water supported in like manner, and other premises generally tending to the deduction that the way to be healthy, wealthy, and wise, was to come to the Marshalsea.

The two tables put together in a corner, were, at length, converted into a very fair bed; and the stranger was left to the Windsor chairs, the presidential tribune, the beery atmosphere, sawdust, pipe-lights, spittoons and repose. But the last item was long, long, long, in linking itself to the rest. The novelty of the place, the coming upon it without preparation, the sense of being locked up, the remembrance of that room up-stairs, of the two brothers, and above all of the retiring childish form, and the face in which he now saw years of insufficient food, if not of want, kept him waking and unhappy.

Speculations, too, bearing the strangest relations towards the prison, but always concerning the prison, ran like nightmares through his mind while he lay awake. Whether coffins were kept ready for people who might die there, where they were kept, how they were kept, where people who died in the prison were buried, how they were taken out, what forms were observed, whether an implacable creditor could arrest the dead? As to escaping, what

chances there were of escape? Whether a prisoner could scale the walls with a cord and grapple, how he would descend upon the other side? whether he could alight on a housetop, steal down a staircase, let himself out at a door, and get lost in the crowd? As to Fire in the prison, if one were to break out while he lay there?

And these involuntary starts of fancy were, after all, but the setting of a picture in which three people kept before him. His father, with the steadfast look with which he had died, prophetically darkened forth in the portrait; his mother, with her arm up, warding off his suspicion; Little Dorrit, with her hand on the degraded arm, and her drooping head turned away.

What if his mother had an old reason she well knew for softening to this poor girl! What if the prisoner now sleeping quietly – Heaven grant it! – by the light of the great Day of judgment should trace back his fall to her. What if any act of hers and of his father's, should have even remotely brought the grey heads of those two brothers so low!

A swift thought shot into his mind. In that long imprisonment here, and in her own long confinement to her room, did his mother find a balance to be struck? 'I admit that I was accessory to that man's captivity. I have suffered for it in kind. He has decayed in his prison: I in mine. I have paid the penalty.'

When all the other thoughts had faded out, this one held possession of him. When he fell asleep, she came before him in her wheeled chair, warding him off with this justification. When he awoke, and sprang up causelessly frightened, the words were

in his ears, as if her voice had slowly spoken them at his pillow, to break his rest: ‘He withers away in his prison; I wither away in mine; inexorable justice is done; what do I owe on this score!’

CHAPTER 9. Little Mother

The morning light was in no hurry to climb the prison wall and look in at the Snuggery windows; and when it did come, it would have been more welcome if it had come alone, instead of bringing a rush of rain with it. But the equinoctial gales were blowing out at sea, and the impartial south-west wind, in its flight, would not neglect even the narrow Marshalsea. While it roared through the steeple of St George's Church, and twirled all the cowls in the neighbourhood, it made a swoop to beat the Southwark smoke into the jail; and, plunging down the chimneys of the few early collegians who were yet lighting their fires, half suffocated them.

Arthur Clennam would have been little disposed to linger in bed, though his bed had been in a more private situation, and less affected by the raking out of yesterday's fire, the kindling of to-day's under the collegiate boiler, the filling of that Spartan vessel at the pump, the sweeping and sawdusting of the common room, and other such preparations. Heartily glad to see the morning, though little rested by the night, he turned out as soon as he could distinguish objects about him, and paced the yard for two heavy hours before the gate was opened.

The walls were so near to one another, and the wild clouds hurried over them so fast, that it gave him a sensation like the beginning of sea-sickness to look up at the gusty sky. The rain,

carried aslant by flaws of wind, blackened that side of the central building which he had visited last night, but left a narrow dry trough under the lee of the wall, where he walked up and down among the waits of straw and dust and paper, the waste droppings of the pump, and the stray leaves of yesterday's greens. It was as haggard a view of life as a man need look upon.

Nor was it relieved by any glimpse of the little creature who had brought him there. Perhaps she glided out of her doorway and in at that where her father lived, while his face was turned from both; but he saw nothing of her. It was too early for her brother; to have seen him once, was to have seen enough of him to know that he would be sluggish to leave whatever frowsy bed he occupied at night; so, as Arthur Clennam walked up and down, waiting for the gate to open, he cast about in his mind for future rather than for present means of pursuing his discoveries.

At last the lodge-gate turned, and the turnkey, standing on the step, taking an early comb at his hair, was ready to let him out. With a joyful sense of release he passed through the lodge, and found himself again in the little outer court-yard where he had spoken to the brother last night.

There was a string of people already straggling in, whom it was not difficult to identify as the nondescript messengers, go-betweens, and errand-bearers of the place. Some of them had been lounging in the rain until the gate should open; others, who had timed their arrival with greater nicety, were coming up now, and passing in with damp whitey-brown paper bags from the

grocers, loaves of bread, lumps of butter, eggs, milk, and the like. The shabbiness of these attendants upon shabbiness, the poverty of these insolvent waiters upon insolvency, was a sight to see. Such threadbare coats and trousers, such fusty gowns and shawls, such squashed hats and bonnets, such boots and shoes, such umbrellas and walking-sticks, never were seen in Rag Fair. All of them wore the cast-off clothes of other men and women, were made up of patches and pieces of other people's individuality, and had no sartorial existence of their own proper. Their walk was the walk of a race apart. They had a peculiar way of doggedly slinking round the corner, as if they were eternally going to the pawnbroker's. When they coughed, they coughed like people accustomed to be forgotten on doorsteps and in draughty passages, waiting for answers to letters in faded ink, which gave the recipients of those manuscripts great mental disturbance and no satisfaction. As they eyed the stranger in passing, they eyed him with borrowing eyes – hungry, sharp, speculative as to his softness if they were accredited to him, and the likelihood of his standing something handsome. Mendicity on commission stooped in their high shoulders, shambled in their unsteady legs, buttoned and pinned and darned and dragged their clothes, frayed their button-holes, leaked out of their figures in dirty little ends of tape, and issued from their mouths in alcoholic breathings.

As these people passed him standing still in the court-yard, and one of them turned back to inquire if he could assist him with

his services, it came into Arthur Clennam's mind that he would speak to Little Dorrit again before he went away. She would have recovered her first surprise, and might feel easier with him. He asked this member of the fraternity (who had two red herrings in his hand, and a loaf and a blacking brush under his arm), where was the nearest place to get a cup of coffee at. The nondescript replied in encouraging terms, and brought him to a coffee-shop in the street within a stone's throw.

'Do you know Miss Dorrit?' asked the new client.

The nondescript knew two Miss Dorrits; one who was born inside – That was the one! That was the one? The nondescript had known her many years. In regard of the other Miss Dorrit, the nondescript lodged in the same house with herself and uncle.

This changed the client's half-formed design of remaining at the coffee-shop until the nondescript should bring him word that Dorrit had issued forth into the street. He entrusted the nondescript with a confidential message to her, importing that the visitor who had waited on her father last night, begged the favour of a few words with her at her uncle's lodging; he obtained from the same source full directions to the house, which was very near; dismissed the nondescript gratified with half-a-crown; and having hastily refreshed himself at the coffee-shop, repaired with all speed to the clarionet-player's dwelling.

There were so many lodgers in this house that the doorpost seemed to be as full of bell-handles as a cathedral organ is of stops. Doubtful which might be the clarionet-stop, he was

considering the point, when a shuttlecock flew out of the parlour window, and alighted on his hat. He then observed that in the parlour window was a blind with the inscription, MR CRIPPLES's ACADEMY; also in another line, EVENING TUITION; and behind the blind was a little white-faced boy, with a slice of bread-and-butter and a battledore. The window being accessible from the footway, he looked in over the blind, returned the shuttlecock, and put his question.

'Dorrit?' said the little white-faced boy (Master Cripples in fact). '*Mr* Dorrit? Third bell and one knock.'

The pupils of Mr Cripples appeared to have been making a copy-book of the street-door, it was so extensively scribbled over in pencil. The frequency of the inscriptions, 'Old Dorrit,' and 'Dirty Dick,' in combination, suggested intentions of personality on the part Of Mr Cripples's pupils. There was ample time to make these observations before the door was opened by the poor old man himself.

'Ha!' said he, very slowly remembering Arthur, 'you were shut in last night?'

'Yes, Mr Dorrit. I hope to meet your niece here presently.'

'Oh!' said he, pondering. 'Out of my brother's way? True. Would you come up-stairs and wait for her?'

'Thank you.'

Turning himself as slowly as he turned in his mind whatever he heard or said, he led the way up the narrow stairs. The house was very close, and had an unwholesome smell. The little staircase

windows looked in at the back windows of other houses as unwholesome as itself, with poles and lines thrust out of them, on which unsightly linen hung; as if the inhabitants were angling for clothes, and had had some wretched bites not worth attending to. In the back garret – a sickly room, with a turn-up bedstead in it, so hastily and recently turned up that the blankets were boiling over, as it were, and keeping the lid open – a half-finished breakfast of coffee and toast for two persons was jumbled down anyhow on a rickety table.

There was no one there. The old man mumbling to himself, after some consideration, that Fanny had run away, went to the next room to fetch her back. The visitor, observing that she held the door on the inside, and that, when the uncle tried to open it, there was a sharp adjuration of 'Don't, stupid!' and an appearance of loose stocking and flannel, concluded that the young lady was in an undress. The uncle, without appearing to come to any conclusion, shuffled in again, sat down in his chair, and began warming his hands at the fire; not that it was cold, or that he had any waking idea whether it was or not.

'What did you think of my brother, sir?' he asked, when he by-and-by discovered what he was doing, left off, reached over to the chimney-piece, and took his clarionet case down.

'I was glad,' said Arthur, very much at a loss, for his thoughts were on the brother before him; 'to find him so well and cheerful.'

'Ha!' muttered the old man, 'yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!'

Arthur wondered what he could possibly want with the

clarionet case. He did not want it at all. He discovered, in due time, that it was not the little paper of snuff (which was also on the chimney-piece), put it back again, took down the snuff instead, and solaced himself with a pinch. He was as feeble, spare, and slow in his pinches as in everything else, but a certain little trickling of enjoyment of them played in the poor worn nerves about the corners of his eyes and mouth.

'Amy, Mr Clennam. What do you think of her?'

'I am much impressed, Mr Dorrit, by all that I have seen of her and thought of her.'

'My brother would have been quite lost without Amy,' he returned. 'We should all have been lost without Amy. She is a very good girl, Amy. She does her duty.'

Arthur fancied that he heard in these praises a certain tone of custom, which he had heard from the father last night with an inward protest and feeling of antagonism. It was not that they stinted her praises, or were insensible to what she did for them; but that they were lazily habituated to her, as they were to all the rest of their condition. He fancied that although they had before them, every day, the means of comparison between her and one another and themselves, they regarded her as being in her necessary place; as holding a position towards them all which belonged to her, like her name or her age. He fancied that they viewed her, not as having risen away from the prison atmosphere, but as appertaining to it; as being vaguely what they had a right to expect, and nothing more.

Her uncle resumed his breakfast, and was munching toast sopped in coffee, oblivious of his guest, when the third bell rang. That was Amy, he said, and went down to let her in; leaving the visitor with as vivid a picture on his mind of his begrimed hands, dirt-worn face, and decayed figure, as if he were still drooping in his chair.

She came up after him, in the usual plain dress, and with the usual timid manner. Her lips were a little parted, as if her heart beat faster than usual.

'Mr Clennam, Amy,' said her uncle, 'has been expecting you some time.'

'I took the liberty of sending you a message.'

'I received the message, sir.'

'Are you going to my mother's this morning? I think not, for it is past your usual hour.'

'Not to-day, sir. I am not wanted to-day.'

'Will you allow Me to walk a little way in whatever direction you may be going? I can then speak to you as we walk, both without detaining you here, and without intruding longer here myself.'

She looked embarrassed, but said, if he pleased. He made a pretence of having mislaid his walking-stick, to give her time to set the bedstead right, to answer her sister's impatient knock at the wall, and to say a word softly to her uncle. Then he found it, and they went down-stairs; she first, he following; the uncle standing at the stair-head, and probably forgetting them before

they had reached the ground floor.

Mr Cripples's pupils, who were by this time coming to school, desisted from their morning recreation of cuffing one another with bags and books, to stare with all the eyes they had at a stranger who had been to see Dirty Dick. They bore the trying spectacle in silence, until the mysterious visitor was at a safe distance; when they burst into pebbles and yells, and likewise into reviling dances, and in all respects buried the pipe of peace with so many savage ceremonies, that, if Mr Cripples had been the chief of the Cripplewayboo tribe with his war-paint on, they could scarcely have done greater justice to their education.

In the midst of this homage, Mr Arthur Clennam offered his arm to Little Dorrit, and Little Dorrit took it. 'Will you go by the Iron Bridge,' said he, 'where there is an escape from the noise of the street?' Little Dorrit answered, if he pleased, and presently ventured to hope that he would 'not mind' Mr Cripples's boys, for she had herself received her education, such as it was, in Mr Cripples's evening academy. He returned, with the best will in the world, that Mr Cripples's boys were forgiven out of the bottom of his soul. Thus did Cripples unconsciously become a master of the ceremonies between them, and bring them more naturally together than Beau Nash might have done if they had lived in his golden days, and he had alighted from his coach and six for the purpose.

The morning remained squally, and the streets were miserably muddy, but no rain fell as they walked towards the Iron Bridge.

The little creature seemed so young in his eyes, that there were moments when he found himself thinking of her, if not speaking to her, as if she were a child. Perhaps he seemed as old in her eyes as she seemed young in his.

'I am sorry to hear you were so inconvenienced last night, sir, as to be locked in. It was very unfortunate.'

It was nothing, he returned. He had had a very good bed.

'Oh yes!' she said quickly; 'she believed there were excellent beds at the coffee-house.' He noticed that the coffee-house was quite a majestic hotel to her, and that she treasured its reputation.

'I believe it is very expensive,' said Little Dorrit, 'but my father has told me that quite beautiful dinners may be got there. And wine,' she added timidly.

'Were you ever there?'

'Oh no! Only into the kitchen to fetch hot water.'

To think of growing up with a kind of awe upon one as to the luxuries of that superb establishment, the Marshalsea Hotel!

'I asked you last night,' said Clennam, 'how you had become acquainted with my mother. Did you ever hear her name before she sent for you?'

'No, sir.'

'Do you think your father ever did?'

'No, sir.'

He met her eyes raised to his with so much wonder in them (she was scared when the encounter took place, and shrunk away again), that he felt it necessary to say:

‘I have a reason for asking, which I cannot very well explain; but you must, on no account, suppose it to be of a nature to cause you the least alarm or anxiety. Quite the reverse. And you think that at no time of your father’s life was my name of Clennam ever familiar to him?’

‘No, sir.’

He felt, from the tone in which she spoke, that she was glancing up at him with those parted lips; therefore he looked before him, rather than make her heart beat quicker still by embarrassing her afresh.

Thus they emerged upon the Iron Bridge, which was as quiet after the roaring streets as though it had been open country. The wind blew roughly, the wet squalls came rattling past them, skimming the pools on the road and pavement, and raining them down into the river. The clouds raced on furiously in the lead-coloured sky, the smoke and mist raced after them, the dark tide ran fierce and strong in the same direction. Little Dorrit seemed the least, the quietest, and weakest of Heaven’s creatures.

‘Let me put you in a coach,’ said Clennam, very nearly adding ‘my poor child.’

She hurriedly declined, saying that wet or dry made little difference to her; she was used to go about in all weathers. He knew it to be so, and was touched with more pity; thinking of the slight figure at his side, making its nightly way through the damp dark boisterous streets to such a place of rest.

‘You spoke so feelingly to me last night, sir, and I found

afterwards that you had been so generous to my father, that I could not resist your message, if it was only to thank you; especially as I wished very much to say to you – ' she hesitated and trembled, and tears rose in her eyes, but did not fall.

'To say to me – ?'

'That I hope you will not misunderstand my father. Don't judge him, sir, as you would judge others outside the gates. He has been there so long! I never saw him outside, but I can understand that he must have grown different in some things since.'

'My thoughts will never be unjust or harsh towards him, believe me.'

'Not,' she said, with a prouder air, as the misgiving evidently crept upon her that she might seem to be abandoning him, 'not that he has anything to be ashamed of for himself, or that I have anything to be ashamed of for him. He only requires to be understood. I only ask for him that his life may be fairly remembered. All that he said was quite true. It all happened just as he related it. He is very much respected. Everybody who comes in, is glad to know him. He is more courted than anyone else. He is far more thought of than the Marshal is.'

If ever pride were innocent, it was innocent in Little Dorrit when she grew boastful of her father.

'It is often said that his manners are a true gentleman's, and quite a study. I see none like them in that place, but he is admitted to be superior to all the rest. This is quite as much why they make

him presents, as because they know him to be needy. He is not to be blamed for being in need, poor love. Who could be in prison a quarter of a century, and be prosperous!'

What affection in her words, what compassion in her repressed tears, what a great soul of fidelity within her, how true the light that shed false brightness round him!

'If I have found it best to conceal where my home is, it is not because I am ashamed of him. God forbid! Nor am I so much ashamed of the place itself as might be supposed. People are not bad because they come there. I have known numbers of good, persevering, honest people come there through misfortune. They are almost all kind-hearted to one another. And it would be ungrateful indeed in me, to forget that I have had many quiet, comfortable hours there; that I had an excellent friend there when I was quite a baby, who was very very fond of me; that I have been taught there, and have worked there, and have slept soundly there. I think it would be almost cowardly and cruel not to have some little attachment for it, after all this.'

She had relieved the faithful fulness of her heart, and modestly said, raising her eyes appealingly to her new friend's, 'I did not mean to say so much, nor have I ever but once spoken about this before. But it seems to set it more right than it was last night. I said I wished you had not followed me, sir. I don't wish it so much now, unless you should think – indeed I don't wish it at all, unless I should have spoken so confusedly, that – that you can scarcely understand me, which I am afraid may be the case.'

He told her with perfect truth that it was not the case; and putting himself between her and the sharp wind and rain, sheltered her as well as he could.

'I feel permitted now,' he said, 'to ask you a little more concerning your father. Has he many creditors?'

'Oh! a great number.'

'I mean detaining creditors, who keep him where he is?'

'Oh yes! a great number.'

'Can you tell me – I can get the information, no doubt, elsewhere, if you cannot – who is the most influential of them?'

Little Dorrit said, after considering a little, that she used to hear long ago of Mr Tite Barnacle as a man of great power. He was a commissioner, or a board, or a trustee, 'or something.' He lived in Grosvenor Square, she thought, or very near it. He was under Government – high in the Circumlocution Office. She appeared to have acquired, in her infancy, some awful impression of the might of this formidable Mr Tite Barnacle of Grosvenor Square, or very near it, and the Circumlocution Office, which quite crushed her when she mentioned him.

'It can do no harm,' thought Arthur, 'if I see this Mr Tite Barnacle.'

The thought did not present itself so quietly but that her quickness intercepted it. 'Ah!' said Little Dorrit, shaking her head with the mild despair of a lifetime. 'Many people used to think once of getting my poor father out, but you don't know how hopeless it is.'

She forgot to be shy at the moment, in honestly warning him away from the sunken wreck he had a dream of raising; and looked at him with eyes which assuredly, in association with her patient face, her fragile figure, her spare dress, and the wind and rain, did not turn him from his purpose of helping her.

'Even if it could be done,' said she – 'and it never can be done now – where could father live, or how could he live? I have often thought that if such a change could come, it might be anything but a service to him now. People might not think so well of him outside as they do there. He might not be so gently dealt with outside as he is there. He might not be so fit himself for the life outside as he is for that.'

Here for the first time she could not restrain her tears from falling; and the little thin hands he had watched when they were so busy, trembled as they clasped each other.

'It would be a new distress to him even to know that I earn a little money, and that Fanny earns a little money. He is so anxious about us, you see, feeling helplessly shut up there. Such a good, good father!'

He let the little burst of feeling go by before he spoke. It was soon gone. She was not accustomed to think of herself, or to trouble any one with her emotions. He had but glanced away at the piles of city roofs and chimneys among which the smoke was rolling heavily, and at the wilderness of masts on the river, and the wilderness of steeples on the shore, indistinctly mixed together in the stormy haze, when she was again as quiet as if she

had been plying her needle in his mother's room.

'You would be glad to have your brother set at liberty?'

'Oh very, very glad, sir!'

'Well, we will hope for him at least. You told me last night of a friend you had?'

His name was Plornish, Little Dorrit said.

And where did Plornish live? Plornish lived in Bleeding Heart Yard. He was 'only a plasterer,' Little Dorrit said, as a caution to him not to form high social expectations of Plornish. He lived at the last house in Bleeding Heart Yard, and his name was over a little gateway.

Arthur took down the address and gave her his. He had now done all he sought to do for the present, except that he wished to leave her with a reliance upon him, and to have something like a promise from her that she would cherish it.

'There is one friend!' he said, putting up his pocketbook. 'As I take you back – you are going back?'

'Oh yes! going straight home.'

' – As I take you back,' the word home jarred upon him, 'let me ask you to persuade yourself that you have another friend. I make no professions, and say no more.'

'You are truly kind to me, sir. I am sure I need no more.'

They walked back through the miserable muddy streets, and among the poor, mean shops, and were jostled by the crowds of dirty hucksters usual to a poor neighbourhood. There was nothing, by the short way, that was pleasant to any of the five

senses. Yet it was not a common passage through common rain, and mire, and noise, to Clennam, having this little, slender, careful creature on his arm. How young she seemed to him, or how old he to her; or what a secret either to the other, in that beginning of the destined interweaving of their stories, matters not here. He thought of her having been born and bred among these scenes, and shrinking through them now, familiar yet misplaced; he thought of her long acquaintance with the squalid needs of life, and of her innocence; of her solicitude for others, and her few years, and her childish aspect.

They were come into the High Street, where the prison stood, when a voice cried, 'Little mother, little mother!' Little Dorrit stopping and looking back, an excited figure of a strange kind bounced against them (still crying 'little mother'), fell down, and scattered the contents of a large basket, filled with potatoes, in the mud.

'Oh, Maggy,' said Little Dorrit, 'what a clumsy child you are!'

Maggy was not hurt, but picked herself up immediately, and then began to pick up the potatoes, in which both Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam helped. Maggy picked up very few potatoes and a great quantity of mud; but they were all recovered, and deposited in the basket. Maggy then smeared her muddy face with her shawl, and presenting it to Mr Clennam as a type of purity, enabled him to see what she was like.

She was about eight-and-twenty, with large bones, large features, large feet and hands, large eyes and no hair. Her large

eyes were limpid and almost colourless; they seemed to be very little affected by light, and to stand unnaturally still. There was also that attentive listening expression in her face, which is seen in the faces of the blind; but she was not blind, having one tolerably serviceable eye. Her face was not exceedingly ugly, though it was only redeemed from being so by a smile; a good-humoured smile, and pleasant in itself, but rendered pitiable by being constantly there. A great white cap, with a quantity of opaque frilling that was always flapping about, apologised for Maggy's baldness, and made it so very difficult for her old black bonnet to retain its place upon her head, that it held on round her neck like a gipsy's baby. A commission of haberdashers could alone have reported what the rest of her poor dress was made of, but it had a strong general resemblance to seaweed, with here and there a gigantic tea-leaf. Her shawl looked particularly like a tea-leaf after long infusion.

Arthur Clennam looked at Little Dorrit with the expression of one saying, 'May I ask who this is?' Little Dorrit, whose hand this Maggy, still calling her little mother, had begun to fondle, answered in words (they were under a gateway into which the majority of the potatoes had rolled).

'This is Maggy, sir.'

'Maggy, sir,' echoed the personage presented. 'Little mother!'

'She is the grand-daughter – ' said Little Dorrit.

'Grand-daughter,' echoed Maggy.

'Of my old nurse, who has been dead a long time. Maggy, how

old are you?'

'Ten, mother,' said Maggy.

'You can't think how good she is, sir,' said Little Dorrit, with infinite tenderness.

'Good *she* is,' echoed Maggy, transferring the pronoun in a most expressive way from herself to her little mother.

'Or how clever,' said Little Dorrit. 'She goes on errands as well as any one.' Maggy laughed. 'And is as trustworthy as the Bank of England.' Maggy laughed. 'She earns her own living entirely. Entirely, sir!' said Little Dorrit, in a lower and triumphant tone. 'Really does!'

'What is her history?' asked Clennam.

'Think of that, Maggy?' said Little Dorrit, taking her two large hands and clapping them together. 'A gentleman from thousands of miles away, wanting to know your history!'

'*My* history?' cried Maggy. 'Little mother.'

'She means me,' said Little Dorrit, rather confused; 'she is very much attached to me. Her old grandmother was not so kind to her as she should have been; was she, Maggy?'

Maggy shook her head, made a drinking vessel of her clenched left hand, drank out of it, and said, 'Gin.' Then beat an imaginary child, and said, 'Broom-handles and pokers.'

'When Maggy was ten years old,' said Little Dorrit, watching her face while she spoke, 'she had a bad fever, sir, and she has never grown any older ever since.'

'Ten years old,' said Maggy, nodding her head. 'But what a

nice hospital! So comfortable, wasn't it? Oh so nice it was. Such a Ev'nly place!'

'She had never been at peace before, sir,' said Little Dorrit, turning towards Arthur for an instant and speaking low, 'and she always runs off upon that.'

'Such beds there is there!' cried Maggy. 'Such lemonades! Such oranges! Such d'licious broth and wine! Such Chicking! Oh, AIN'T it a delightful place to go and stop at!'

'So Maggy stopped there as long as she could,' said Little Dorrit, in her former tone of telling a child's story; the tone designed for Maggy's ear, 'and at last, when she could stop there no longer, she came out. Then, because she was never to be more than ten years old, however long she lived – '

'However long she lived,' echoed Maggy.

' – And because she was very weak; indeed was so weak that when she began to laugh she couldn't stop herself – which was a great pity – '

(Maggy mighty grave of a sudden.)

' – Her grandmother did not know what to do with her, and for some years was very unkind to her indeed. At length, in course of time, Maggy began to take pains to improve herself, and to be very attentive and very industrious; and by degrees was allowed to come in and out as often as she liked, and got enough to do to support herself, and does support herself. And that,' said Little Dorrit, clapping the two great hands together again, 'is Maggy's history, as Maggy knows!'

Ah! But Arthur would have known what was wanting to its completeness, though he had never heard of the words Little mother; though he had never seen the fondling of the small spare hand; though he had had no sight for the tears now standing in the colourless eyes; though he had had no hearing for the sob that checked the clumsy laugh. The dirty gateway with the wind and rain whistling through it, and the basket of muddy potatoes waiting to be spilt again or taken up, never seemed the common hole it really was, when he looked back to it by these lights. Never, never!

They were very near the end of their walk, and they now came out of the gateway to finish it. Nothing would serve Maggy but that they must stop at a grocer's window, short of their destination, for her to show her learning. She could read after a sort; and picked out the fat figures in the tickets of prices, for the most part correctly. She also stumbled, with a large balance of success against her failures, through various philanthropic recommendations to Try our Mixture, Try our Family Black, Try our Orange-flavoured Pekoe, challenging competition at the head of Flowery Teas; and various cautions to the public against spurious establishments and adulterated articles. When he saw how pleasure brought a rosy tint into Little Dorrit's face when Maggy made a hit, he felt that he could have stood there making a library of the grocer's window until the rain and wind were tired.

The court-yard received them at last, and there he said goodbye to Little Dorrit. Little as she had always looked, she

looked less than ever when he saw her going into the Marshalsea lodge passage, the little mother attended by her big child.

The cage door opened, and when the small bird, reared in captivity, had tamely fluttered in, he saw it shut again; and then he came away.

CHAPTER 10. Containing the whole Science of Government

The Circumlocution Office was (as everybody knows without being told) the most important Department under Government. No public business of any kind could possibly be done at any time without the acquiescence of the Circumlocution Office. Its finger was in the largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart. It was equally impossible to do the plainest right and to undo the plainest wrong without the express authority of the Circumlocution Office. If another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence, on the part of the Circumlocution Office.

This glorious establishment had been early in the field, when the one sublime principle involving the difficult art of governing a country, was first distinctly revealed to statesmen. It had been foremost to study that bright revelation and to carry its shining influence through the whole of the official proceedings. Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving – HOW NOT TO DO IT.

Through this delicate perception, through the tact with which it invariably seized it, and through the genius with which it always acted on it, the Circumlocution Office had risen to overtop all the public departments; and the public condition had risen to be – what it was.

It is true that How not to do it was the great study and object of all public departments and professional politicians all round the Circumlocution Office. It is true that every new premier and every new government, coming in because they had upheld a certain thing as necessary to be done, were no sooner come in than they applied their utmost faculties to discovering How not to do it. It is true that from the moment when a general election was over, every returned man who had been raving on hustings because it hadn't been done, and who had been asking the friends of the honourable gentleman in the opposite interest on pain of impeachment to tell him why it hadn't been done, and who had been asserting that it must be done, and who had been pledging himself that it should be done, began to devise, How it was not to be done. It is true that the debates of both Houses of Parliament the whole session through, uniformly tended to the protracted deliberation, How not to do it. It is true that the royal speech at the opening of such session virtually said, My lords and gentlemen, you have a considerable stroke of work to do, and you will please to retire to your respective chambers, and discuss, How not to do it. It is true that the royal speech, at the close of such session, virtually said, My lords and gentlemen,

you have through several laborious months been considering with great loyalty and patriotism, How not to do it, and you have found out; and with the blessing of Providence upon the harvest (natural, not political), I now dismiss you. All this is true, but the Circumlocution Office went beyond it.

Because the Circumlocution Office went on mechanically, every day, keeping this wonderful, all-sufficient wheel of statesmanship, How not to do it, in motion. Because the Circumlocution Office was down upon any ill-advised public servant who was going to do it, or who appeared to be by any surprising accident in remote danger of doing it, with a minute, and a memorandum, and a letter of instructions that extinguished him. It was this spirit of national efficiency in the Circumlocution Office that had gradually led to its having something to do with everything. Mechanicians, natural philosophers, soldiers, sailors, petitioners, memorialists, people with grievances, people who wanted to prevent grievances, people who wanted to redress grievances, jobbing people, jobbed people, people who couldn't get rewarded for merit, and people who couldn't get punished for demerit, were all indiscriminately tucked up under the foolscap paper of the Circumlocution Office.

Numbers of people were lost in the Circumlocution Office. Unfortunates with wrongs, or with projects for the general welfare (and they had better have had wrongs at first, than have taken that bitter English recipe for certainly getting them), who in slow lapse of time and agony had passed safely through

other public departments; who, according to rule, had been bullied in this, over-reached by that, and evaded by the other; got referred at last to the Circumlocution Office, and never reappeared in the light of day. Boards sat upon them, secretaries minuted upon them, commissioners gabbled about them, clerks registered, entered, checked, and ticked them off, and they melted away. In short, all the business of the country went through the Circumlocution Office, except the business that never came out of it; and *its* name was Legion.

Sometimes, angry spirits attacked the Circumlocution Office. Sometimes, parliamentary questions were asked about it, and even parliamentary motions made or threatened about it by demagogues so low and ignorant as to hold that the real recipe of government was, How to do it. Then would the noble lord, or right honourable gentleman, in whose department it was to defend the Circumlocution Office, put an orange in his pocket, and make a regular field-day of the occasion. Then would he come down to that house with a slap upon the table, and meet the honourable gentleman foot to foot. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that the Circumlocution Office not only was blameless in this matter, but was commendable in this matter, was extollable to the skies in this matter. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that, although the Circumlocution Office was invariably right and wholly right, it never was so right as in this matter. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that it would have been more to

his honour, more to his credit, more to his good taste, more to his good sense, more to half the dictionary of commonplaces, if he had left the Circumlocution Office alone, and never approached this matter. Then would he keep one eye upon a coach or crammer from the Circumlocution Office sitting below the bar, and smash the honourable gentleman with the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. And although one of two things always happened; namely, either that the Circumlocution Office had nothing to say and said it, or that it had something to say of which the noble lord, or right honourable gentleman, blundered one half and forgot the other; the Circumlocution Office was always voted immaculate by an accommodating majority.

Such a nursery of statesmen had the Department become in virtue of a long career of this nature, that several solemn lords had attained the reputation of being quite unearthly prodigies of business, solely from having practised, How not to do it, as the head of the Circumlocution Office. As to the minor priests and acolytes of that temple, the result of all this was that they stood divided into two classes, and, down to the junior messenger, either believed in the Circumlocution Office as a heaven-born institution that had an absolute right to do whatever it liked; or took refuge in total infidelity, and considered it a flagrant nuisance.

The Barnacle family had for some time helped to administer the Circumlocution Office. The Tite Barnacle Branch, indeed, considered themselves in a general way as having vested rights

in that direction, and took it ill if any other family had much to say to it. The Barnacles were a very high family, and a very large family. They were dispersed all over the public offices, and held all sorts of public places. Either the nation was under a load of obligation to the Barnacles, or the Barnacles were under a load of obligation to the nation. It was not quite unanimously settled which; the Barnacles having their opinion, the nation theirs.

The Mr Tite Barnacle who at the period now in question usually coached or crammed the statesman at the head of the Circumlocution Office, when that noble or right honourable individual sat a little uneasily in his saddle by reason of some vagabond making a tilt at him in a newspaper, was more flush of blood than money. As a Barnacle he had his place, which was a snug thing enough; and as a Barnacle he had of course put in his son Barnacle Junior in the office. But he had intermarried with a branch of the Stiltstalkings, who were also better endowed in a sanguineous point of view than with real or personal property, and of this marriage there had been issue, Barnacle junior and three young ladies. What with the patrician requirements of Barnacle junior, the three young ladies, Mrs Tite Barnacle nee Stiltstalking, and himself, Mr Tite Barnacle found the intervals between quarter day and quarter day rather longer than he could have desired; a circumstance which he always attributed to the country's parsimony.

For Mr Tite Barnacle, Mr Arthur Clennam made his fifth inquiry one day at the Circumlocution Office; having on previous

occasions awaited that gentleman successively in a hall, a glass case, a waiting room, and a fire-proof passage where the Department seemed to keep its wind. On this occasion Mr Barnacle was not engaged, as he had been before, with the noble prodigy at the head of the Department; but was absent. Barnacle Junior, however, was announced as a lesser star, yet visible above the office horizon.

With Barnacle junior, he signified his desire to confer; and found that young gentleman singeing the calves of his legs at the parental fire, and supporting his spine against the mantel-shelf. It was a comfortable room, handsomely furnished in the higher official manner; an presenting stately suggestions of the absent Barnacle, in the thick carpet, the leather-covered desk to sit at, the leather-covered desk to stand at, the formidable easy-chair and hearth-rug, the interposed screen, the torn-up papers, the dispatch-boxes with little labels sticking out of them, like medicine bottles or dead game, the pervading smell of leather and mahogany, and a general bamboozling air of How not to do it.

The present Barnacle, holding Mr Clennam's card in his hand, had a youthful aspect, and the fluffiest little whisker, perhaps, that ever was seen. Such a downy tip was on his callow chin, that he seemed half fledged like a young bird; and a compassionate observer might have urged that, if he had not singed the calves of his legs, he would have died of cold. He had a superior eye-glass dangling round his neck, but unfortunately had such flat orbits to

his eyes and such limp little eyelids that it wouldn't stick in when he put it up, but kept tumbling out against his waistcoat buttons with a click that discomposed him very much.

'Oh, I say. Look here! My father's not in the way, and won't be in the way to-day,' said Barnacle Junior. 'Is this anything that I can do?'

(Click! Eye-glass down. Barnacle Junior quite frightened and feeling all round himself, but not able to find it.)

'You are very good,' said Arthur Clennam. 'I wish however to see Mr Barnacle.'

'But I say. Look here! You haven't got any appointment, you know,' said Barnacle Junior.

(By this time he had found the eye-glass, and put it up again.)

'No,' said Arthur Clennam. 'That is what I wish to have.'

'But I say. Look here! Is this public business?' asked Barnacle junior.

(Click! Eye-glass down again. Barnacle Junior in that state of search after it that Mr Clennam felt it useless to reply at present.)

'Is it,' said Barnacle junior, taking heed of his visitor's brown face, 'anything about – Tonnage – or that sort of thing?'

(Pausing for a reply, he opened his right eye with his hand, and stuck his glass in it, in that inflammatory manner that his eye began watering dreadfully.)

'No,' said Arthur, 'it is nothing about tonnage.'

'Then look here. Is it private business?'

'I really am not sure. It relates to a Mr Dorrit.'

‘Look here, I tell you what! You had better call at our house, if you are going that way. Twenty-four, Mews Street, Grosvenor Square. My father’s got a slight touch of the gout, and is kept at home by it.’

(The misguided young Barnacle evidently going blind on his eye-glass side, but ashamed to make any further alteration in his painful arrangements.)

‘Thank you. I will call there now. Good morning.’ Young Barnacle seemed discomfited at this, as not having at all expected him to go.

‘You are quite sure,’ said Barnacle junior, calling after him when he got to the door, unwilling wholly to relinquish the bright business idea he had conceived; ‘that it’s nothing about Tonnage?’

‘Quite sure.’

With such assurance, and rather wondering what might have taken place if it *had* been anything about tonnage, Mr Clennam withdrew to pursue his inquiries.

Mews Street, Grosvenor Square, was not absolutely Grosvenor Square itself, but it was very near it. It was a hideous little street of dead wall, stables, and dunghills, with lofts over coach-houses inhabited by coachmen’s families, who had a passion for drying clothes and decorating their window-sills with miniature turnpike-gates. The principal chimney-sweep of that fashionable quarter lived at the blind end of Mews Street; and the same corner contained an establishment much frequented about early morning and twilight for the purchase of wine-bottles and

kitchen-stuff. Punch's shows used to lean against the dead wall in Mews Street, while their proprietors were dining elsewhere; and the dogs of the neighbourhood made appointments to meet in the same locality. Yet there were two or three small airless houses at the entrance end of Mews Street, which went at enormous rents on account of their being abject hangers-on to a fashionable situation; and whenever one of these fearful little coops was to be let (which seldom happened, for they were in great request), the house agent advertised it as a gentlemanly residence in the most aristocratic part of town, inhabited solely by the elite of the beau monde.

If a gentlemanly residence coming strictly within this narrow margin had not been essential to the blood of the Barnacles, this particular branch would have had a pretty wide selection among, let us say, ten thousand houses, offering fifty times the accommodation for a third of the money. As it was, Mr Barnacle, finding his gentlemanly residence extremely inconvenient and extremely dear, always laid it, as a public servant, at the door of the country, and adduced it as another instance of the country's parsimony.

Arthur Clennam came to a squeezed house, with a ramshackle bowed front, little dingy windows, and a little dark area like a damp waistcoat-pocket, which he found to be number twenty-four, Mews Street, Grosvenor Square. To the sense of smell the house was like a sort of bottle filled with a strong distillation of Mews; and when the footman opened the door, he seemed to

take the stopper out.

The footman was to the Grosvenor Square footmen, what the house was to the Grosvenor Square houses. Admirable in his way, his way was a back and a bye way. His gorgeousness was not unmixed with dirt; and both in complexion and consistency he had suffered from the closeness of his pantry. A sallow flabbiness was upon him when he took the stopper out, and presented the bottle to Mr Clennam's nose.

'Be so good as to give that card to Mr Tite Barnacle, and to say that I have just now seen the younger Mr Barnacle, who recommended me to call here.'

The footman (who had as many large buttons with the Barnacle crest upon them on the flaps of his pockets, as if he were the family strong box, and carried the plate and jewels about with him buttoned up) pondered over the card a little; then said, 'Walk in.' It required some judgment to do it without butting the inner hall-door open, and in the consequent mental confusion and physical darkness slipping down the kitchen stairs. The visitor, however, brought himself up safely on the door-mat.

Still the footman said 'Walk in,' so the visitor followed him. At the inner hall-door, another bottle seemed to be presented and another stopper taken out. This second vial appeared to be filled with concentrated provisions and extract of Sink from the pantry. After a skirmish in the narrow passage, occasioned by the footman's opening the door of the dismal dining-room with confidence, finding some one there with consternation, and

backing on the visitor with disorder, the visitor was shut up, pending his announcement, in a close back parlour. There he had an opportunity of refreshing himself with both the bottles at once, looking out at a low blinding wall three feet off, and speculating on the number of Barnacle families within the bills of mortality who lived in such hutches of their own free flunkey choice.

Mr Barnacle would see him. Would he walk up-stairs? He would, and he did; and in the drawing-room, with his leg on a rest, he found Mr Barnacle himself, the express image and presentment of How not to do it.

Mr Barnacle dated from a better time, when the country was not so parsimonious and the Circumlocution Office was not so badgered. He wound and wound folds of white cravat round his neck, as he wound and wound folds of tape and paper round the neck of the country. His wristbands and collar were oppressive; his voice and manner were oppressive. He had a large watch-chain and bunch of seals, a coat buttoned up to inconvenience, a waistcoat buttoned up to inconvenience, an unwrinkled pair of trousers, a stiff pair of boots. He was altogether splendid, massive, overpowering, and impracticable. He seemed to have been sitting for his portrait to Sir Thomas Lawrence all the days of his life.

'Mr Clennam?' said Mr Barnacle. 'Be seated.'

Mr Clennam became seated.

'You have called on me, I believe,' said Mr Barnacle, 'at the

Circumlocution – ' giving it the air of a word of about five-and-twenty syllables – 'Office.'

'I have taken that liberty.'

Mr Barnacle solemnly bent his head as who should say, 'I do not deny that it is a liberty; proceed to take another liberty, and let me know your business.'

'Allow me to observe that I have been for some years in China, am quite a stranger at home, and have no personal motive or interest in the inquiry I am about to make.'

Mr Barnacle tapped his fingers on the table, and, as if he were now sitting for his portrait to a new and strange artist, appeared to say to his visitor, 'If you will be good enough to take me with my present lofty expression, I shall feel obliged.'

'I have found a debtor in the Marshalsea Prison of the name of Dorrit, who has been there many years. I wish to investigate his confused affairs so far as to ascertain whether it may not be possible, after this lapse of time, to ameliorate his unhappy condition. The name of Mr Tite Barnacle has been mentioned to me as representing some highly influential interest among his creditors. Am I correctly informed?'

It being one of the principles of the Circumlocution Office never, on any account whatever, to give a straightforward answer, Mr Barnacle said, 'Possibly.'

'On behalf of the Crown, may I ask, or as private individual?'

'The Circumlocution Department, sir,' Mr Barnacle replied, 'may have possibly recommended – possibly – I cannot say –

that some public claim against the insolvent estate of a firm or copartnership to which this person may have belonged, should be enforced. The question may have been, in the course of official business, referred to the Circumlocution Department for its consideration. The Department may have either originated, or confirmed, a Minute making that recommendation.'

'I assume this to be the case, then.'

'The Circumlocution Department,' said Mr Barnacle, 'is not responsible for any gentleman's assumptions.'

'May I inquire how I can obtain official information as to the real state of the case?'

'It is competent,' said Mr Barnacle, 'to any member of the – Public,' mentioning that obscure body with reluctance, as his natural enemy, 'to memorialise the Circumlocution Department. Such formalities as are required to be observed in so doing, may be known on application to the proper branch of that Department.'

'Which is the proper branch?'

'I must refer you,' returned Mr Barnacle, ringing the bell, 'to the Department itself for a formal answer to that inquiry.'

'Excuse my mentioning – '

'The Department is accessible to the – Public,' Mr Barnacle was always checked a little by that word of impertinent signification, 'if the – Public approaches it according to the official forms; if the – Public does not approach it according to the official forms, the – Public has itself to blame.'

Mr Barnacle made him a severe bow, as a wounded man of family, a wounded man of place, and a wounded man of a gentlemanly residence, all rolled into one; and he made Mr Barnacle a bow, and was shut out into Mews Street by the flabby footman.

Having got to this pass, he resolved as an exercise in perseverance, to betake himself again to the Circumlocution Office, and try what satisfaction he could get there. So he went back to the Circumlocution Office, and once more sent up his card to Barnacle junior by a messenger who took it very ill indeed that he should come back again, and who was eating mashed potatoes and gravy behind a partition by the hall fire.

He was readmitted to the presence of Barnacle junior, and found that young gentleman singeing his knees now, and gaping his weary way on to four o'clock.

'I say. Look here. You stick to us in a devil of a manner,' Said Barnacle junior, looking over his shoulder.

'I want to know – '

'Look here. Upon my soul you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know,' remonstrated Barnacle junior, turning about and putting up the eye-glass.

'I want to know,' said Arthur Clennam, who had made up his mind to persistence in one short form of words, 'the precise nature of the claim of the Crown against a prisoner for debt, named Dorrit.'

'I say. Look here. You really are going it at a great pace,

you know. Egad, you haven't got an appointment,' said Barnacle junior, as if the thing were growing serious.

'I want to know,' said Arthur, and repeated his case.

Barnacle junior stared at him until his eye-glass fell out, and then put it in again and stared at him until it fell out again. 'You have no right to come this sort of move,' he then observed with the greatest weakness. 'Look here. What do you mean? You told me you didn't know whether it was public business or not.'

'I have now ascertained that it is public business,' returned the suitor, 'and I want to know' – and again repeated his monotonous inquiry.

Its effect upon young Barnacle was to make him repeat in a defenceless way, 'Look here! Upon my SOUL you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know!' The effect of that upon Arthur Clennam was to make him repeat his inquiry in exactly the same words and tone as before. The effect of that upon young Barnacle was to make him a wonderful spectacle of failure and helplessness.

'Well, I tell you what. Look here. You had better try the Secretarial Department,' he said at last, sidling to the bell and ringing it. 'Jenkinson,' to the mashed potatoes messenger, 'Mr Wobbler!'

Arthur Clennam, who now felt that he had devoted himself to the storming of the Circumlocution Office, and must go through with it, accompanied the messenger to another floor of the building, where that functionary pointed out Mr Wobbler's room.

He entered that apartment, and found two gentlemen sitting face to face at a large and easy desk, one of whom was polishing a gun-barrel on his pocket-handkerchief, while the other was spreading marmalade on bread with a paper-knife.

'Mr Wobbler?' inquired the suitor.

Both gentlemen glanced at him, and seemed surprised at his assurance.

'So he went,' said the gentleman with the gun-barrel, who was an extremely deliberate speaker, 'down to his cousin's place, and took the Dog with him by rail. Inestimable Dog. Flew at the porter fellow when he was put into the dog-box, and flew at the guard when he was taken out. He got half-a-dozen fellows into a Barn, and a good supply of Rats, and timed the Dog. Finding the Dog able to do it immensely, made the match, and heavily backed the Dog. When the match came off, some devil of a fellow was bought over, Sir, Dog was made drunk, Dog's master was cleaned out.'

'Mr Wobbler?' inquired the suitor.

The gentleman who was spreading the marmalade returned, without looking up from that occupation, 'What did he call the Dog?'

'Called him Lovely,' said the other gentleman. 'Said the Dog was the perfect picture of the old aunt from whom he had expectations. Found him particularly like her when hocussed.'

'Mr Wobbler?' said the suitor.

Both gentlemen laughed for some time. The gentleman with

the gun-barrel, considering it, on inspection, in a satisfactory state, referred it to the other; receiving confirmation of his views, he fitted it into its place in the case before him, and took out the stock and polished that, softly whistling.

'Mr Wobbler?' said the suitor.

'What's the matter?' then said Mr Wobbler, with his mouth full.

'I want to know – ' and Arthur Clennam again mechanically set forth what he wanted to know.

'Can't inform you,' observed Mr Wobbler, apparently to his lunch. 'Never heard of it. Nothing at all to do with it. Better try Mr Clive, second door on the left in the next passage.'

'Perhaps he will give me the same answer.'

'Very likely. Don't know anything about it,' said Mr Wobbler.

The suitor turned away and had left the room, when the gentleman with the gun called out 'Mister! Hallo!'

He looked in again.

'Shut the door after you. You're letting in a devil of a draught here!'

A few steps brought him to the second door on the left in the next passage. In that room he found three gentlemen; number one doing nothing particular, number two doing nothing particular, number three doing nothing particular. They seemed, however, to be more directly concerned than the others had been in the effective execution of the great principle of the office, as there was an awful inner apartment with a double door, in which

the Circumlocution Sages appeared to be assembled in council, and out of which there was an imposing coming of papers, and into which there was an imposing going of papers, almost constantly; wherein another gentleman, number four, was the active instrument.

'I want to know,' said Arthur Clennam, – and again stated his case in the same barrel-organ way. As number one referred him to number two, and as number two referred him to number three, he had occasion to state it three times before they all referred him to number four, to whom he stated it again.

Number four was a vivacious, well-looking, well-dressed, agreeable young fellow – he was a Barnacle, but on the more sprightly side of the family – and he said in an easy way, 'Oh! you had better not bother yourself about it, I think.'

'Not bother myself about it?'

'No! I recommend you not to bother yourself about it.'

This was such a new point of view that Arthur Clennam found himself at a loss how to receive it.

'You can if you like. I can give you plenty of forms to fill up. Lots of 'em here. You can have a dozen if you like. But you'll never go on with it,' said number four.

'Would it be such hopeless work? Excuse me; I am a stranger in England.'

'*I* don't say it would be hopeless,' returned number four, with a frank smile. 'I don't express an opinion about that; I only express an opinion about you. *I* don't think you'd go on with it. However,

of course, you can do as you like. I suppose there was a failure in the performance of a contract, or something of that kind, was there?'

'I really don't know.'

'Well! That you can find out. Then you'll find out what Department the contract was in, and then you'll find out all about it there.'

'I beg your pardon. How shall I find out?'

'Why, you'll – you'll ask till they tell you. Then you'll memorialise that Department (according to regular forms which you'll find out) for leave to memorialise this Department. If you get it (which you may after a time), that memorial must be entered in that Department, sent to be registered in this Department, sent back to be signed by that Department, sent back to be countersigned by this Department, and then it will begin to be regularly before that Department. You'll find out when the business passes through each of these stages by asking at both Departments till they tell you.'

'But surely this is not the way to do the business,' Arthur Clennam could not help saying.

This airy young Barnacle was quite entertained by his simplicity in supposing for a moment that it was. This light in hand young Barnacle knew perfectly that it was not. This touch and go young Barnacle had 'got up' the Department in a private secretaryship, that he might be ready for any little bit of fat that came to hand; and he fully understood the Department to be

a politico-diplomatic hocus pocus piece of machinery for the assistance of the nobs in keeping off the snobs. This dashing young Barnacle, in a word, was likely to become a statesman, and to make a figure.

'When the business is regularly before that Department, whatever it is,' pursued this bright young Barnacle, 'then you can watch it from time to time through that Department. When it comes regularly before this Department, then you must watch it from time to time through this Department. We shall have to refer it right and left; and when we refer it anywhere, then you'll have to look it up. When it comes back to us at any time, then you had better look *us* up. When it sticks anywhere, you'll have to try to give it a jog. When you write to another Department about it, and then to this Department about it, and don't hear anything satisfactory about it, why then you had better – keep on writing.'

Arthur Clennam looked very doubtful indeed. 'But I am obliged to you at any rate,' said he, 'for your politeness.'

'Not at all,' replied this engaging young Barnacle. 'Try the thing, and see how you like it. It will be in your power to give it up at any time, if you don't like it. You had better take a lot of forms away with you. Give him a lot of forms!' With which instruction to number two, this sparkling young Barnacle took a fresh handful of papers from numbers one and three, and carried them into the sanctuary to offer to the presiding Idol of the Circumlocution Office.

Arthur Clennam put his forms in his pocket gloomily enough,

and went his way down the long stone passage and the long stone staircase. He had come to the swing doors leading into the street, and was waiting, not over patiently, for two people who were between him and them to pass out and let him follow, when the voice of one of them struck familiarly on his ear. He looked at the speaker and recognised Mr Meagles. Mr Meagles was very red in the face – redder than travel could have made him – and collaring a short man who was with him, said, 'come out, you rascal, come Out!'

It was such an unexpected hearing, and it was also such an unexpected sight to see Mr Meagles burst the swing doors open, and emerge into the street with the short man, who was of an unoffending appearance, that Clennam stood still for the moment exchanging looks of surprise with the porter. He followed, however, quickly; and saw Mr Meagles going down the street with his enemy at his side. He soon came up with his old travelling companion, and touched him on the back. The choleric face which Mr Meagles turned upon him smoothed when he saw who it was, and he put out his friendly hand.

'How are you?' said Mr Meagles. 'How d'ye *do?* I have only just come over from abroad. I am glad to see you.'

'And I am rejoiced to see you.'

'Thank'ee. Thank'ee!'

'Mrs Meagles and your daughter – ?'

'Are as well as possible,' said Mr Meagles. 'I only wish you had come upon me in a more prepossessing condition as to coolness.'

Though it was anything but a hot day, Mr Meagles was in a heated state that attracted the attention of the passersby; more particularly as he leaned his back against a railing, took off his hat and cravat, and heartily rubbed his steaming head and face, and his reddened ears and neck, without the least regard for public opinion.

'Whew!' said Mr Meagles, dressing again. 'That's comfortable. Now I am cooler.'

'You have been ruffled, Mr Meagles. What is the matter?'

'Wait a bit, and I'll tell you. Have you leisure for a turn in the Park?'

'As much as you please.'

'Come along then. Ah! you may well look at him.' He happened to have turned his eyes towards the offender whom Mr Meagles had so angrily collared. 'He's something to look at, that fellow is.'

He was not much to look at, either in point of size or in point of dress; being merely a short, square, practical looking man, whose hair had turned grey, and in whose face and forehead there were deep lines of cogitation, which looked as though they were carved in hard wood. He was dressed in decent black, a little rusty, and had the appearance of a sagacious master in some handicraft. He had a spectacle-case in his hand, which he turned over and over while he was thus in question, with a certain free use of the thumb that is never seen but in a hand accustomed to tools.

'You keep with us,' said Mr Meagles, in a threatening kind of

Way, 'and I'll introduce you presently. Now then!'

Clennam wondered within himself, as they took the nearest way to the Park, what this unknown (who complied in the gentlest manner) could have been doing. His appearance did not at all justify the suspicion that he had been detected in designs on Mr Meagles's pocket-handkerchief; nor had he any appearance of being quarrelsome or violent. He was a quiet, plain, steady man; made no attempt to escape; and seemed a little depressed, but neither ashamed nor repentant. If he were a criminal offender, he must surely be an incorrigible hypocrite; and if he were no offender, why should Mr Meagles have collared him in the Circumlocution Office? He perceived that the man was not a difficulty in his own mind alone, but in Mr Meagles's too; for such conversation as they had together on the short way to the Park was by no means well sustained, and Mr Meagles's eye always wandered back to the man, even when he spoke of something very different.

At length they being among the trees, Mr Meagles stopped short, and said:

'Mr Clennam, will you do me the favour to look at this man? His name is Doyce, Daniel Doyce. You wouldn't suppose this man to be a notorious rascal; would you?'

'I certainly should not.' It was really a disconcerting question, with the man there.

'No. You would not. I know you would not. You wouldn't suppose him to be a public offender; would you?'

‘No.’

‘No. But he is. He is a public offender. What has he been guilty of? Murder, manslaughter, arson, forgery, swindling, house-breaking, highway robbery, larceny, conspiracy, fraud? Which should you say, now?’

‘I should say,’ returned Arthur Clennam, observing a faint smile in Daniel Doyce’s face, ‘not one of them.’

‘You are right,’ said Mr Meagles. ‘But he has been ingenious, and he has been trying to turn his ingenuity to his country’s service. That makes him a public offender directly, sir.’

Arthur looked at the man himself, who only shook his head.

‘This Doyce,’ said Mr Meagles, ‘is a smith and engineer. He is not in a large way, but he is well known as a very ingenious man. A dozen years ago, he perfects an invention (involving a very curious secret process) of great importance to his country and his fellow-creatures. I won’t say how much money it cost him, or how many years of his life he had been about it, but he brought it to perfection a dozen years ago. Wasn’t it a dozen?’ said Mr Meagles, addressing Doyce. ‘He is the most exasperating man in the world; he never complains!’

‘Yes. Rather better than twelve years ago.’

‘Rather better?’ said Mr Meagles, ‘you mean rather worse. Well, Mr Clennam, he addresses himself to the Government. The moment he addresses himself to the Government, he becomes a public offender! Sir,’ said Mr Meagles, in danger of making himself excessively hot again, ‘he ceases to be an innocent citizen,

and becomes a culprit. He is treated from that instant as a man who has done some infernal action. He is a man to be shirked, put off, brow-beaten, sneered at, handed over by this highly-connected young or old gentleman, to that highly-connected young or old gentleman, and dodged back again; he is a man with no rights in his own time, or his own property; a mere outlaw, whom it is justifiable to get rid of anyhow; a man to be worn out by all possible means.'

It was not so difficult to believe, after the morning's experience, as Mr Meagles supposed.

'Don't stand there, Doyce, turning your spectacle-case over and over,' cried Mr Meagles, 'but tell Mr Clennam what you confessed to me.'

'I undoubtedly was made to feel,' said the inventor, 'as if I had committed an offence. In dancing attendance at the various offices, I was always treated, more or less, as if it was a very bad offence. I have frequently found it necessary to reflect, for my own self-support, that I really had not done anything to bring myself into the Newgate Calendar, but only wanted to effect a great saving and a great improvement.'

'There!' said Mr Meagles. 'Judge whether I exaggerate. Now you'll be able to believe me when I tell you the rest of the case.'

With this prelude, Mr Meagles went through the narrative; the established narrative, which has become tiresome; the matter-of-course narrative which we all know by heart. How, after interminable attendance and correspondence, after infinite

impertinences, ignorances, and insults, my lords made a Minute, number three thousand four hundred and seventy-two, allowing the culprit to make certain trials of his invention at his own expense. How the trials were made in the presence of a board of six, of whom two ancient members were too blind to see it, two other ancient members were too deaf to hear it, one other ancient member was too lame to get near it, and the final ancient member was too pig-headed to look at it. How there were more years; more impertinences, ignorances, and insults. How my lords then made a Minute, number five thousand one hundred and three, whereby they resigned the business to the Circumlocution Office. How the Circumlocution Office, in course of time, took up the business as if it were a bran new thing of yesterday, which had never been heard of before; muddled the business, addled the business, tossed the business in a wet blanket. How the impertinences, ignorances, and insults went through the multiplication table. How there was a reference of the invention to three Barnacles and a Stiltstalking, who knew nothing about it; into whose heads nothing could be hammered about it; who got bored about it, and reported physical impossibilities about it. How the Circumlocution Office, in a Minute, number eight thousand seven hundred and forty, 'saw no reason to reverse the decision at which my lords had arrived.' How the Circumlocution Office, being reminded that my lords had arrived at no decision, shelved the business. How there had been a final interview with the head of the Circumlocution Office that very morning, and

how the Brazen Head had spoken, and had been, upon the whole, and under all the circumstances, and looking at it from the various points of view, of opinion that one of two courses was to be pursued in respect of the business: that was to say, either to leave it alone for evermore, or to begin it all over again.

'Upon which,' said Mr Meagles, 'as a practical man, I then and there, in that presence, took Doyce by the collar, and told him it was plain to me that he was an infamous rascal and treasonable disturber of the government peace, and took him away. I brought him out of the office door by the collar, that the very porter might know I was a practical man who appreciated the official estimate of such characters; and here we are!'

If that airy young Barnacle had been there, he would have frankly told them perhaps that the Circumlocution Office had achieved its function. That what the Barnacles had to do, was to stick on to the national ship as long as they could. That to trim the ship, lighten the ship, clean the ship, would be to knock them off; that they could but be knocked off once; and that if the ship went down with them yet sticking to it, that was the ship's look out, and not theirs.

'There!' said Mr Meagles, 'now you know all about Doyce. Except, which I own does not improve my state of mind, that even now you don't hear him complain.'

'You must have great patience,' said Arthur Clennam, looking at him with some wonder, 'great forbearance.'

'No,' he returned, 'I don't know that I have more than another

man.'

'By the Lord, you have more than I have, though!' cried Mr Meagles.

Doyce smiled, as he said to Clennam, 'You see, my experience of these things does not begin with myself. It has been in my way to know a little about them from time to time. Mine is not a particular case. I am not worse used than a hundred others who have put themselves in the same position – than all the others, I was going to say.'

'I don't know that I should find that a consolation, if it were my case; but I am very glad that you do.'

'Understand me! I don't say,' he replied in his steady, planning way, and looking into the distance before him as if his grey eye were measuring it, 'that it's recompense for a man's toil and hope; but it's a certain sort of relief to know that I might have counted on this.'

He spoke in that quiet deliberate manner, and in that undertone, which is often observable in mechanics who consider and adjust with great nicety. It belonged to him like his suppleness of thumb, or his peculiar way of tilting up his hat at the back every now and then, as if he were contemplating some half-finished work of his hand and thinking about it.

'Disappointed?' he went on, as he walked between them under the trees. 'Yes. No doubt I am disappointed. Hurt? Yes. No doubt I am hurt. That's only natural. But what I mean when I say that people who put themselves in the same position are mostly used

in the same way – ’

‘In England,’ said Mr Meagles.

‘Oh! of course I mean in England. When they take their inventions into foreign countries, that’s quite different. And that’s the reason why so many go there.’

Mr Meagles very hot indeed again.

‘What I mean is, that however this comes to be the regular way of our government, it is its regular way. Have you ever heard of any projector or inventor who failed to find it all but inaccessible, and whom it did not discourage and ill-treat?’

‘I cannot say that I ever have.’

‘Have you ever known it to be beforehand in the adoption of any useful thing? Ever known it to set an example of any useful kind?’

‘I am a good deal older than my friend here,’ said Mr Meagles, ‘and I’ll answer that. Never.’

‘But we all three have known, I expect,’ said the inventor, ‘a pretty many cases of its fixed determination to be miles upon miles, and years upon years, behind the rest of us; and of its being found out persisting in the use of things long superseded, even after the better things were well known and generally taken up?’

They all agreed upon that.

‘Well then,’ said Doyce, with a sigh, ‘as I know what such a metal will do at such a temperature, and such a body under such a pressure, so I may know (if I will only consider), how these great lords and gentlemen will certainly deal with such a matter

as mine. I have no right to be surprised, with a head upon my shoulders, and memory in it, that I fall into the ranks with all who came before me. I ought to have let it alone. I have had warning enough, I am sure.'

With that he put up his spectacle-case, and said to Arthur, 'If I don't complain, Mr Clennam, I can feel gratitude; and I assure you that I feel it towards our mutual friend. Many's the day, and many's the way in which he has backed me.'

'Stuff and nonsense,' said Mr Meagles.

Arthur could not but glance at Daniel Doyce in the ensuing silence. Though it was evidently in the grain of his character, and of his respect for his own case, that he should abstain from idle murmuring, it was evident that he had grown the older, the sterner, and the poorer, for his long endeavour. He could not but think what a blessed thing it would have been for this man, if he had taken a lesson from the gentlemen who were so kind as to take a nation's affairs in charge, and had learnt How not to do it.

Mr Meagles was hot and despondent for about five minutes, and then began to cool and clear up.

'Come, come!' said he. 'We shall not make this the better by being grim. Where do you think of going, Dan?'

'I shall go back to the factory,' said Dan.

'Why then, we'll all go back to the factory, or walk in that direction,' returned Mr Meagles cheerfully. 'Mr Clennam won't be deterred by its being in Bleeding Heart Yard.'

'Bleeding Heart Yard?' said Clennam. 'I want to go there.'

‘So much the better,’ cried Mr Meagles. ‘Come along!’

As they went along, certainly one of the party, and probably more than one, thought that Bleeding Heart Yard was no inappropriate destination for a man who had been in official correspondence with my lords and the Barnacles – and perhaps had a misgiving also that Britannia herself might come to look for lodgings in Bleeding Heart Yard some ugly day or other, if she over-did the Circumlocution Office.

CHAPTER 11. Let Loose

A late, dull autumn night was closing in upon the river Saone. The stream, like a sullied looking-glass in a gloomy place, reflected the clouds heavily; and the low banks leaned over here and there, as if they were half curious, and half afraid, to see their darkening pictures in the water. The flat expanse of country about Chalons lay a long heavy streak, occasionally made a little ragged by a row of poplar trees against the wrathful sunset. On the banks of the river Saone it was wet, depressing, solitary; and the night deepened fast.

One man slowly moving on towards Chalons was the only visible figure in the landscape. Cain might have looked as lonely and avoided. With an old sheepskin knapsack at his back, and a rough, unbarked stick cut out of some wood in his hand; miry, footsore, his shoes and gaiters trodden out, his hair and beard untrimmed; the cloak he carried over his shoulder, and the clothes he wore, sodden with wet; limping along in pain and difficulty; he looked as if the clouds were hurrying from him, as if the wail of the wind and the shuddering of the grass were directed against him, as if the low mysterious plashing of the water murmured at him, as if the fitful autumn night were disturbed by him.

He glanced here, and he glanced there, sullenly but shrinkingly; and sometimes stopped and turned about, and

looked all round him. Then he limped on again, toiling and muttering.

'To the devil with this plain that has no end! To the devil with these stones that cut like knives! To the devil with this dismal darkness, wrapping itself about one with a chill! I hate you!'

And he would have visited his hatred upon it all with the scowl he threw about him, if he could. He trudged a little further; and looking into the distance before him, stopped again.

'I, hungry, thirsty, weary. You, imbeciles, where the lights are yonder, eating and drinking, and warming yourselves at fires! I wish I had the sacking of your town; I would repay you, my children!'

But the teeth he set at the town, and the hand he shook at the town, brought the town no nearer; and the man was yet hungrier, and thirstier, and wearier, when his feet were on its jagged pavement, and he stood looking about him.

There was the hotel with its gateway, and its savoury smell of cooking; there was the cafe with its bright windows, and its rattling of dominoes; there was the dyer's with its strips of red cloth on the doorposts; there was the silversmith's with its earrings, and its offerings for altars; there was the tobacco dealer's with its lively group of soldier customers coming out pipe in mouth; there were the bad odours of the town, and the rain and the refuse in the kennels, and the faint lamps slung across the road, and the huge Diligence, and its mountain of luggage, and its six grey horses with their tails tied up, getting under weigh at the

coach office. But no small cabaret for a straitened traveller being within sight, he had to seek one round the dark corner, where the cabbage leaves lay thickest, trodden about the public cistern at which women had not yet left off drawing water. There, in the back street he found one, the Break of Day. The curtained windows clouded the Break of Day, but it seemed light and warm, and it announced in legible inscriptions with appropriate pictorial embellishment of billiard cue and ball, that at the Break of Day one could play billiards; that there one could find meat, drink, and lodgings, whether one came on horseback, or came on foot; and that it kept good wines, liqueurs, and brandy. The man turned the handle of the Break of Day door, and limped in.

He touched his discoloured slouched hat, as he came in at the door, to a few men who occupied the room. Two were playing dominoes at one of the little tables; three or four were seated round the stove, conversing as they smoked; the billiard-table in the centre was left alone for the time; the landlady of the Daybreak sat behind her little counter among her cloudy bottles of syrups, baskets of cakes, and leaden drainage for glasses, working at her needle.

Making his way to an empty little table in a corner of the room behind the stove, he put down his knapsack and his cloak upon the ground. As he raised his head from stooping to do so, he found the landlady beside him.

'One can lodge here to-night, madame?'

'Perfectly!' said the landlady in a high, sing-song, cheery

voice.

‘Good. One can dine – sup – what you please to call it?’

‘Ah, perfectly!’ cried the landlady as before.

‘Dispatch then, madame, if you please. Something to eat, as quickly as you can; and some wine at once. I am exhausted.’

‘It is very bad weather, monsieur,’ said the landlady.

‘Cursed weather.’

‘And a very long road.’

‘A cursed road.’

His hoarse voice failed him, and he rested his head upon his hands until a bottle of wine was brought from the counter. Having filled and emptied his little tumbler twice, and having broken off an end from the great loaf that was set before him with his cloth and napkin, soup-plate, salt, pepper, and oil, he rested his back against the corner of the wall, made a couch of the bench on which he sat, and began to chew crust, until such time as his repast should be ready.

There had been that momentary interruption of the talk about the stove, and that temporary inattention to and distraction from one another, which is usually inseparable in such a company from the arrival of a stranger. It had passed over by this time; and the men had done glancing at him, and were talking again.

‘That’s the true reason,’ said one of them, bringing a story he had been telling, to a close, ‘that’s the true reason why they said that the devil was let loose.’ The speaker was the tall Swiss belonging to the church, and he brought something of the

authority of the church into the discussion – especially as the devil was in question.

The landlady having given her directions for the new guest's entertainment to her husband, who acted as cook to the Break of Day, had resumed her needlework behind her counter. She was a smart, neat, bright little woman, with a good deal of cap and a good deal of stocking, and she struck into the conversation with several laughing nods of her head, but without looking up from her work.

'Ah Heaven, then,' said she. 'When the boat came up from Lyons, and brought the news that the devil was actually let loose at Marseilles, some fly-catchers swallowed it. But I? No, not I.'

'Madame, you are always right,' returned the tall Swiss. 'Doubtless you were enraged against that man, madame?'

'Ay, yes, then!' cried the landlady, raising her eyes from her work, opening them very wide, and tossing her head on one side. 'Naturally, yes.'

'He was a bad subject.'

'He was a wicked wretch,' said the landlady, 'and well merited what he had the good fortune to escape. So much the worse.'

'Stay, madame! Let us see,' returned the Swiss, argumentatively turning his cigar between his lips. 'It may have been his unfortunate destiny. He may have been the child of circumstances. It is always possible that he had, and has, good in him if one did but know how to find it out. Philosophical philanthropy teaches – '

The rest of the little knot about the stove murmured an objection to the introduction of that threatening expression. Even the two players at dominoes glanced up from their game, as if to protest against philosophical philanthropy being brought by name into the Break of Day.

'Hold there, you and your philanthropy,' cried the smiling landlady, nodding her head more than ever. 'Listen then. I am a woman, I. I know nothing of philosophical philanthropy. But I know what I have seen, and what I have looked in the face in this world here, where I find myself. And I tell you this, my friend, that there are people (men and women both, unfortunately) who have no good in them – none. That there are people whom it is necessary to detest without compromise. That there are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race. That there are people who have no human heart, and who must be crushed like savage beasts and cleared out of the way. They are but few, I hope; but I have seen (in this world here where I find myself, and even at the little Break of Day) that there are such people. And I do not doubt that this man – whatever they call him, I forget his name – is one of them.'

The landlady's lively speech was received with greater favour at the Break of Day, than it would have elicited from certain amiable whitewashers of the class she so unreasonably objected to, nearer Great Britain.

'My faith! If your philosophical philanthropy,' said the landlady, putting down her work, and rising to take the stranger's

soup from her husband, who appeared with it at a side door, 'puts anybody at the mercy of such people by holding terms with them at all, in words or deeds, or both, take it away from the Break of Day, for it isn't worth a sou.'

As she placed the soup before the guest, who changed his attitude to a sitting one, he looked her full in the face, and his moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache.

'Well!' said the previous speaker, 'let us come back to our subject. Leaving all that aside, gentlemen, it was because the man was acquitted on his trial that people said at Marseilles that the devil was let loose. That was how the phrase began to circulate, and what it meant; nothing more.'

'How do they call him?' said the landlady. 'Biraud, is it not?'

'Rigaud, madame,' returned the tall Swiss.

'Rigaud! To be sure.'

The traveller's soup was succeeded by a dish of meat, and that by a dish of vegetables. He ate all that was placed before him, emptied his bottle of wine, called for a glass of rum, and smoked his cigarette with his cup of coffee. As he became refreshed, he became overbearing; and patronised the company at the Daybreak in certain small talk at which he assisted, as if his condition were far above his appearance.

The company might have had other engagements, or they might have felt their inferiority, but in any case they dispersed by degrees, and not being replaced by other company, left their

new patron in possession of the Break of Day. The landlord was clinking about in his kitchen; the landlady was quiet at her work; and the refreshed traveller sat smoking by the stove, warming his ragged feet.

'Pardon me, madame – that Biraud.'

'Rigaud, monsieur.'

'Rigaud. Pardon me again – has contracted your displeasure, how?'

The landlady, who had been at one moment thinking within herself that this was a handsome man, at another moment that this was an ill-looking man, observed the nose coming down and the moustache going up, and strongly inclined to the latter decision. Rigaud was a criminal, she said, who had killed his wife.

'Ay, ay? Death of my life, that's a criminal indeed. But how do you know it?'

'All the world knows it.'

'Hah! And yet he escaped justice?'

'Monsieur, the law could not prove it against him to its satisfaction. So the law says. Nevertheless, all the world knows he did it. The people knew it so well, that they tried to tear him to pieces.'

'Being all in perfect accord with their own wives?' said the guest. 'Haha!'

The landlady of the Break of Day looked at him again, and felt almost confirmed in her last decision. He had a fine hand,

though, and he turned it with a great show. She began once more to think that he was not ill-looking after all.

'Did you mention, madame – or was it mentioned among the gentlemen – what became of him?'

The landlady shook her head; it being the first conversational stage at which her vivacious earnestness had ceased to nod it, keeping time to what she said. It had been mentioned at the Daybreak, she remarked, on the authority of the journals, that he had been kept in prison for his own safety. However that might be, he had escaped his deserts; so much the worse.

The guest sat looking at her as he smoked out his final cigarette, and as she sat with her head bent over her work, with an expression that might have resolved her doubts, and brought her to a lasting conclusion on the subject of his good or bad looks if she had seen it. When she did look up, the expression was not there. The hand was smoothing his shaggy moustache.

'May one ask to be shown to bed, madame?'

Very willingly, monsieur. Hola, my husband! My husband would conduct him up-stairs. There was one traveller there, asleep, who had gone to bed very early indeed, being overpowered by fatigue; but it was a large chamber with two beds in it, and space enough for twenty. This the landlady of the Break of Day chirpingly explained, calling between whiles, 'Hola, my husband!' out at the side door.

My husband answered at length, 'It is I, my wife!' and presenting himself in his cook's cap, lighted the traveller up

a steep and narrow staircase; the traveller carrying his own cloak and knapsack, and bidding the landlady good night with a complimentary reference to the pleasure of seeing her again to-morrow. It was a large room, with a rough splintery floor, unplastered rafters overhead, and two bedsteads on opposite sides. Here 'my husband' put down the candle he carried, and with a sidelong look at his guest stooping over his knapsack, gruffly gave him the instruction, 'The bed to the right!' and left him to his repose. The landlord, whether he was a good or a bad physiognomist, had fully made up his mind that the guest was an ill-looking fellow.

The guest looked contemptuously at the clean coarse bedding prepared for him, and, sitting down on the rush chair at the bedside, drew his money out of his pocket, and told it over in his hand. 'One must eat,' he muttered to himself, 'but by Heaven I must eat at the cost of some other man to-morrow!'

As he sat pondering, and mechanically weighing his money in his palm, the deep breathing of the traveller in the other bed fell so regularly upon his hearing that it attracted his eyes in that direction. The man was covered up warm, and had drawn the white curtain at his head, so that he could be only heard, not seen. But the deep regular breathing, still going on while the other was taking off his worn shoes and gaiters, and still continuing when he had laid aside his coat and cravat, became at length a strong provocative to curiosity, and incentive to get a glimpse of the sleeper's face.

The waking traveller, therefore, stole a little nearer, and yet a little nearer, and a little nearer to the sleeping traveller's bed, until he stood close beside it. Even then he could not see his face, for he had drawn the sheet over it. The regular breathing still continuing, he put his smooth white hand (such a treacherous hand it looked, as it went creeping from him!) to the sheet, and gently lifted it away.

'Death of my soul!' he whispered, falling back, 'here's Cavalletto!'

The little Italian, previously influenced in his sleep, perhaps, by the stealthy presence at his bedside, stopped in his regular breathing, and with a long deep respiration opened his eyes. At first they were not awake, though open. He lay for some seconds looking placidly at his old prison companion, and then, all at once, with a cry of surprise and alarm, sprang out of bed.

'Hush! What's the matter? Keep quiet! It's I. You know me?' cried the other, in a suppressed voice.

But John Baptist, widely staring, muttering a number of invocations and ejaculations, tremblingly backing into a corner, slipping on his trousers, and tying his coat by the two sleeves round his neck, manifested an unmistakable desire to escape by the door rather than renew the acquaintance. Seeing this, his old prison comrade fell back upon the door, and set his shoulders against it.

'Cavalletto! Wake, boy! Rub your eyes and look at me. Not the name you used to call me – don't use that – Lagnier, say Lagnier!'

John Baptist, staring at him with eyes opened to their utmost width, made a number of those national, backhanded shakes of the right forefinger in the air, as if he were resolved on negativing beforehand everything that the other could possibly advance during the whole term of his life.

'Cavalletto! Give me your hand. You know Lagnier, the gentleman. Touch the hand of a gentleman!'

Submitting himself to the old tone of condescending authority, John Baptist, not at all steady on his legs as yet, advanced and put his hand in his patron's. Monsieur Lagnier laughed; and having given it a squeeze, tossed it up and let it go.

'Then you were – ' faltered John Baptist.

'Not shaved? No. See here!' cried Lagnier, giving his head a twirl; 'as tight on as your own.'

John Baptist, with a slight shiver, looked all round the room as if to recall where he was. His patron took that opportunity of turning the key in the door, and then sat down upon his bed.

'Look!' he said, holding up his shoes and gaiters. 'That's a poor trim for a gentleman, you'll say. No matter, you shall see how soon I'll mend it. Come and sit down. Take your old place!'

John Baptist, looking anything but reassured, sat down on the floor at the bedside, keeping his eyes upon his patron all the time.

'That's well!' cried Lagnier. 'Now we might be in the old infernal hole again, hey? How long have you been out?'

'Two days after you, my master.'

'How do you come here?'

‘I was cautioned not to stay there, and so I left the town at once, and since then I have changed about. I have been doing odds and ends at Avignon, at Pont Esprit, at Lyons; upon the Rhone, upon the Saone.’ As he spoke, he rapidly mapped the places out with his sunburnt hand upon the floor.

‘And where are you going?’

‘Going, my master?’

‘Ay!’

John Baptist seemed to desire to evade the question without knowing how. ‘By Bacchus!’ he said at last, as if he were forced to the admission, ‘I have sometimes had a thought of going to Paris, and perhaps to England.’

‘Cavalletto. This is in confidence. I also am going to Paris and perhaps to England. We’ll go together.’

The little man nodded his head, and showed his teeth; and yet seemed not quite convinced that it was a surpassingly desirable arrangement.

‘We’ll go together,’ repeated Lagnier. ‘You shall see how soon I will force myself to be recognised as a gentleman, and you shall profit by it. It is agreed? Are we one?’

‘Oh, surely, surely!’ said the little man.

‘Then you shall hear before I sleep – and in six words, for I want sleep – how I appear before you, I, Lagnier. Remember that. Not the other.’

‘Altro, altro! Not Ri – ’ Before John Baptist could finish the name, his comrade had got his hand under his chin and fiercely

shut up his mouth.

'Death! what are you doing? Do you want me to be trampled upon and stoned? Do *you* want to be trampled upon and stoned? You would be. You don't imagine that they would set upon me, and let my prison chum go? Don't think it!'

There was an expression in his face as he released his grip of his friend's jaw, from which his friend inferred that if the course of events really came to any stoning and trampling, Monsieur Lagnier would so distinguish him with his notice as to ensure his having his full share of it. He remembered what a cosmopolitan gentleman Monsieur Lagnier was, and how few weak distinctions he made.

'I am a man,' said Monsieur Lagnier, 'whom society has deeply wronged since you last saw me. You know that I am sensitive and brave, and that it is my character to govern. How has society respected those qualities in me? I have been shrieked at through the streets. I have been guarded through the streets against men, and especially women, running at me armed with any weapons they could lay their hands on. I have lain in prison for security, with the place of my confinement kept a secret, lest I should be torn out of it and felled by a hundred blows. I have been carted out of Marseilles in the dead of night, and carried leagues away from it packed in straw. It has not been safe for me to go near my house; and, with a beggar's pittance in my pocket, I have walked through vile mud and weather ever since, until my feet are crippled – look at them! Such are the humiliations that society

has inflicted upon me, possessing the qualities I have mentioned, and which you know me to possess. But society shall pay for it.'

All this he said in his companion's ear, and with his hand before his lips.

'Even here,' he went on in the same way, 'even in this mean drinking-shop, society pursues me. Madame defames me, and her guests defame me. I, too, a gentleman with manners and accomplishments to strike them dead! But the wrongs society has heaped upon me are treasured in this breast.'

To all of which John Baptist, listening attentively to the suppressed hoarse voice, said from time to time, 'Surely, surely!' tossing his head and shutting his eyes, as if there were the clearest case against society that perfect candour could make out.

'Put my shoes there,' continued Lagnier. 'Hang my cloak to dry there by the door. Take my hat.' He obeyed each instruction, as it was given. 'And this is the bed to which society consigns me, is it? Hah. *Very* well!'

As he stretched out his length upon it, with a ragged handkerchief bound round his wicked head, and only his wicked head showing above the bedclothes, John Baptist was rather strongly reminded of what had so very nearly happened to prevent the moustache from any more going up as it did, and the nose from any more coming down as it did.

'Shaken out of destiny's dice-box again into your company, eh? By Heaven! So much the better for you. You'll profit by it. I shall need a long rest. Let me sleep in the morning.'

John Baptist replied that he should sleep as long as he would, and wishing him a happy night, put out the candle. One might have supposed that the next proceeding of the Italian would have been to undress; but he did exactly the reverse, and dressed himself from head to foot, saving his shoes. When he had so done, he lay down upon his bed with some of its coverings over him, and his coat still tied round his neck, to get through the night.

When he started up, the Godfather Break of Day was peeping at its namesake. He rose, took his shoes in his hand, turned the key in the door with great caution, and crept downstairs. Nothing was astir there but the smell of coffee, wine, tobacco, and syrups; and madame's little counter looked ghastly enough. But he had paid madame his little note at it over night, and wanted to see nobody – wanted nothing but to get on his shoes and his knapsack, open the door, and run away.

He prospered in his object. No movement or voice was heard when he opened the door; no wicked head tied up in a ragged handkerchief looked out of the upper window. When the sun had raised his full disc above the flat line of the horizon, and was striking fire out of the long muddy vista of paved road with its weary avenue of little trees, a black speck moved along the road and splashed among the flaming pools of rain-water, which black speck was John Baptist Cavalletto running away from his patron.

CHAPTER 12. Bleeding Heart Yard

In London itself, though in the old rustic road towards a suburb of note where in the days of William Shakespeare, author and stage-player, there were Royal hunting-seats – howbeit no sport is left there now but for hunters of men – Bleeding Heart Yard was to be found; a place much changed in feature and in fortune, yet with some relish of ancient greatness about it. Two or three mighty stacks of chimneys, and a few large dark rooms which had escaped being walled and subdivided out of the recognition of their old proportions, gave the Yard a character. It was inhabited by poor people, who set up their rest among its faded glories, as Arabs of the desert pitch their tents among the fallen stones of the Pyramids; but there was a family sentimental feeling prevalent in the Yard, that it had a character.

As if the aspiring city had become puffed up in the very ground on which it stood, the ground had so risen about Bleeding Heart Yard that you got into it down a flight of steps which formed no part of the original approach, and got out of it by a low gateway into a maze of shabby streets, which went about and about, tortuously ascending to the level again. At this end of the Yard and over the gateway, was the factory of Daniel Doyce, often heavily beating like a bleeding heart of iron, with the clink of metal upon metal.

The opinion of the Yard was divided respecting the derivation

of its name. The more practical of its inmates abided by the tradition of a murder; the gentler and more imaginative inhabitants, including the whole of the tender sex, were loyal to the legend of a young lady of former times closely imprisoned in her chamber by a cruel father for remaining true to her own true love, and refusing to marry the suitor he chose for her. The legend related how that the young lady used to be seen up at her window behind the bars, murmuring a love-lorn song of which the burden was, 'Bleeding Heart, Bleeding Heart, bleeding away,' until she died. It was objected by the murderous party that this Refrain was notoriously the invention of a tambour-worker, a spinster and romantic, still lodging in the Yard. But, forasmuch as all favourite legends must be associated with the affections, and as many more people fall in love than commit murder – which it may be hoped, howsoever bad we are, will continue until the end of the world to be the dispensation under which we shall live – the Bleeding Heart, Bleeding Heart, bleeding away story, carried the day by a great majority. Neither party would listen to the antiquaries who delivered learned lectures in the neighbourhood, showing the Bleeding Heart to have been the heraldic cognisance of the old family to whom the property had once belonged. And, considering that the hour-glass they turned from year to year was filled with the earthiest and coarsest sand, the Bleeding Heart Yarders had reason enough for objecting to be despoiled of the one little golden grain of poetry that sparkled in it.

Down in to the Yard, by way of the steps, came Daniel Doyce,

Mr Meagles, and Clennam. Passing along the Yard, and between the open doors on either hand, all abundantly garnished with light children nursing heavy ones, they arrived at its opposite boundary, the gateway. Here Arthur Clennam stopped to look about him for the domicile of Plornish, plasterer, whose name, according to the custom of Londoners, Daniel Doyce had never seen or heard of to that hour.

It was plain enough, nevertheless, as Little Dorrit had said; over a lime-splashed gateway in the corner, within which Plornish kept a ladder and a barrel or two. The last house in Bleeding Heart Yard which she had described as his place of habitation, was a large house, let off to various tenants; but Plornish ingeniously hinted that he lived in the parlour, by means of a painted hand under his name, the forefinger of which hand (on which the artist had depicted a ring and a most elaborate nail of the genteelest form) referred all inquirers to that apartment.

Parting from his companions, after arranging another meeting with Mr Meagles, Clennam went alone into the entry, and knocked with his knuckles at the parlour-door. It was opened presently by a woman with a child in her arms, whose unoccupied hand was hastily rearranging the upper part of her dress. This was Mrs Plornish, and this maternal action was the action of Mrs Plornish during a large part of her waking existence.

Was Mr Plornish at home? 'Well, sir,' said Mrs Plornish, a civil woman, 'not to deceive you, he's gone to look for a job.'

'Not to deceive you' was a method of speech with Mrs

Plornish. She would deceive you, under any circumstances, as little as might be; but she had a trick of answering in this provisional form.

'Do you think he will be back soon, if I wait for him?'

'I have been expecting him,' said Mrs Plornish, 'this half an hour, at any minute of time. Walk in, sir.'

Arthur entered the rather dark and close parlour (though it was lofty too), and sat down in the chair she placed for him.

'Not to deceive you, sir, I notice it,' said Mrs Plornish, 'and I take it kind of you.'

He was at a loss to understand what she meant; and by expressing as much in his looks, elicited her explanation.

'It ain't many that comes into a poor place, that deems it worth their while to move their hats,' said Mrs Plornish. 'But people think more of it than people think.'

Clennam returned, with an uncomfortable feeling in so very slight a courtesy being unusual, Was that all! And stooping down to pinch the cheek of another young child who was sitting on the floor, staring at him, asked Mrs Plornish how old that fine boy was?

'Four year just turned, sir,' said Mrs Plornish. 'He *is* a fine little fellow, ain't he, sir? But this one is rather sickly.' She tenderly hushed the baby in her arms, as she said it. 'You wouldn't mind my asking if it happened to be a job as you was come about, sir, would you?' asked Mrs Plornish wistfully.

She asked it so anxiously, that if he had been in possession of

any kind of tenement, he would have had it plastered a foot deep rather than answer No. But he was obliged to answer No; and he saw a shade of disappointment on her face, as she checked a sigh, and looked at the low fire. Then he saw, also, that Mrs Plornish was a young woman, made somewhat slatternly in herself and her belongings by poverty; and so dragged at by poverty and the children together, that their united forces had already dragged her face into wrinkles.

'All such things as jobs,' said Mrs Plornish, 'seems to me to have gone underground, they do indeed.' (Herein Mrs Plornish limited her remark to the plastering trade, and spoke without reference to the Circumlocution Office and the Barnacle Family.)

'Is it so difficult to get work?' asked Arthur Clennam.

'Plornish finds it so,' she returned. 'He is quite unfortunate. Really he is.'

Really he was. He was one of those many wayfarers on the road of life, who seem to be afflicted with supernatural corns, rendering it impossible for them to keep up even with their lame competitors. A willing, working, soft hearted, not hard-headed fellow, Plornish took his fortune as smoothly as could be expected; but it was a rough one. It so rarely happened that anybody seemed to want him, it was such an exceptional case when his powers were in any request, that his misty mind could not make out how it happened. He took it as it came, therefore; he tumbled into all kinds of difficulties, and tumbled out of them;

and, by tumbling through life, got himself considerably bruised.

'It's not for want of looking after jobs, I am sure,' said Mrs Plornish, lifting up her eyebrows, and searching for a solution of the problem between the bars of the grate; 'nor yet for want of working at them when they are to be got. No one ever heard my husband complain of work.'

Somehow or other, this was the general misfortune of Bleeding Heart Yard. From time to time there were public complaints, pathetically going about, of labour being scarce – which certain people seemed to take extraordinarily ill, as though they had an absolute right to it on their own terms – but Bleeding Heart Yard, though as willing a Yard as any in Britain, was never the better for the demand. That high old family, the Barnacles, had long been too busy with their great principle to look into the matter; and indeed the matter had nothing to do with their watchfulness in out-generalling all other high old families except the Stiltstalkings.

While Mrs Plornish spoke in these words of her absent lord, her lord returned. A smooth-cheeked, fresh-coloured, sandy-whiskered man of thirty. Long in the legs, yielding at the knees, foolish in the face, flannel-jacketed, lime-whitened.

'This is Plornish, sir.'

'I came,' said Clennam, rising, 'to beg the favour of a little conversation with you on the subject of the Dorrit family.'

Plornish became suspicious. Seemed to scent a creditor. Said, 'Ah, yes. Well. He didn't know what satisfaction *he* could give

any gentleman, respecting that family. What might it be about, now?'

'I know you better,' said Clennam, smiling, 'than you suppose.'

Plornish observed, not smiling in return, And yet he hadn't the pleasure of being acquainted with the gentleman, neither.

'No,' said Arthur, 'I know your kind offices at second hand, but on the best authority; through Little Dorrit. – I mean,' he explained, 'Miss Dorrit.'

'Mr Clennam, is it? Oh! I've heard of you, Sir.'

'And I of you,' said Arthur.

'Please to sit down again, Sir, and consider yourself welcome. – Why, yes,' said Plornish, taking a chair, and lifting the elder child upon his knee, that he might have the moral support of speaking to a stranger over his head, 'I have been on the wrong side of the Lock myself, and in that way we come to know Miss Dorrit. Me and my wife, we are well acquainted with Miss Dorrit.'

'Intimate!' cried Mrs Plornish. Indeed, she was so proud of the acquaintance, that she had awakened some bitterness of spirit in the Yard by magnifying to an enormous amount the sum for which Miss Dorrit's father had become insolvent. The Bleeding Hearts resented her claiming to know people of such distinction.

'It was her father that I got acquainted with first. And through getting acquainted with him, you see – why – I got acquainted with her,' said Plornish tautologically.

'I see.'

‘Ah! And there’s manners! There’s polish! There’s a gentleman to have run to seed in the Marshalsea jail! Why, perhaps you are not aware,’ said Plornish, lowering his voice, and speaking with a perverse admiration of what he ought to have pitied or despised, ‘not aware that Miss Dorrit and her sister dursn’t let him know that they work for a living. No!’ said Plornish, looking with a ridiculous triumph first at his wife, and then all round the room. ‘Dursn’t let him know it, they dursn’t!’

‘Without admiring him for that,’ Clennam quietly observed, ‘I am very sorry for him.’ The remark appeared to suggest to Plornish, for the first time, that it might not be a very fine trait of character after all. He pondered about it for a moment, and gave it up.

‘As to me,’ he resumed, ‘certainly Mr Dorrit is as affable with me, I am sure, as I can possibly expect. Considering the differences and distances betwixt us, more so. But it’s Miss Dorrit that we were speaking of.’

‘True. Pray how did you introduce her at my mother’s!’

Mr Plornish picked a bit of lime out of his whisker, put it between his lips, turned it with his tongue like a sugar-plum, considered, found himself unequal to the task of lucid explanation, and appealing to his wife, said, ‘Sally, *you* may as well mention how it was, old woman.’

‘Miss Dorrit,’ said Sally, hushing the baby from side to side, and laying her chin upon the little hand as it tried to disarrange the gown again, ‘came here one afternoon with a bit of writing,

telling that how she wished for needlework, and asked if it would be considered any ill-conwenience in case she was to give her address here.' (Plornish repeated, her address here, in a low voice, as if he were making responses at church.) 'Me and Plornish says, No, Miss Dorrit, no ill-conwenience,' (Plornish repeated, no ill-conwenience,) 'and she wrote it in, according. Which then me and Plornish says, Ho Miss Dorrit!' (Plornish repeated, Ho Miss Dorrit.) 'Have you thought of copying it three or four times, as the way to make it known in more places than one? No, says Miss Dorrit, I have not, but I will. She copied it out according, on this table, in a sweet writing, and Plornish, he took it where he worked, having a job just then,' (Plornish repeated job just then,) 'and likewise to the landlord of the Yard; through which it was that Mrs Clennam first happened to employ Miss Dorrit.' Plornish repeated, employ Miss Dorrit; and Mrs Plornish having come to an end, feigned to bite the fingers of the little hand as she kissed it.

'The landlord of the Yard,' said Arthur Clennam, 'is – '

'He is Mr Casby, by name, he is,' said Plornish, 'and Pancks, he collects the rents. That,' added Mr Plornish, dwelling on the subject with a slow thoughtfulness that appeared to have no connection with any specific object, and to lead him nowhere, 'that is about what *they* are, you may believe me or not, as you think proper.'

'Ay?' returned Clennam, thoughtful in his turn. 'Mr Casby, too! An old acquaintance of mine, long ago!'

Mr Plornish did not see his road to any comment on this fact, and made none. As there truly was no reason why he should have the least interest in it, Arthur Clennam went on to the present purport of his visit; namely, to make Plornish the instrument of effecting Tip's release, with as little detriment as possible to the self-reliance and self-helpfulness of the young man, supposing him to possess any remnant of those qualities: without doubt a very wide stretch of supposition. Plornish, having been made acquainted with the cause of action from the Defendant's own mouth, gave Arthur to understand that the Plaintiff was a 'Chaunter' – meaning, not a singer of anthems, but a seller of horses – and that he (Plornish) considered that ten shillings in the pound 'would settle handsome,' and that more would be a waste of money. The Principal and instrument soon drove off together to a stable-yard in High Holborn, where a remarkably fine grey gelding, worth, at the lowest figure, seventy-five guineas (not taking into account the value of the shot he had been made to swallow for the improvement of his form), was to be parted with for a twenty-pound note, in consequence of his having run away last week with Mrs Captain Barbary of Cheltenham, who wasn't up to a horse of his courage, and who, in mere spite, insisted on selling him for that ridiculous sum: or, in other words, on giving him away. Plornish, going up this yard alone and leaving his Principal outside, found a gentleman with tight drab legs, a rather old hat, a little hooked stick, and a blue neckerchief (Captain Maroon of Gloucestershire, a private friend of Captain Barbary);

who happened to be there, in a friendly way, to mention these little circumstances concerning the remarkably fine grey gelding to any real judge of a horse and quick snapper-up of a good thing, who might look in at that address as per advertisement. This gentleman, happening also to be the Plaintiff in the Tip case, referred Mr Plornish to his solicitor, and declined to treat with Mr Plornish, or even to endure his presence in the yard, unless he appeared there with a twenty-pound note: in which case only, the gentleman would augur from appearances that he meant business, and might be induced to talk to him. On this hint, Mr Plornish retired to communicate with his Principal, and presently came back with the required credentials. Then said Captain Maroon, 'Now, how much time do you want to make the other twenty in? Now, I'll give you a month.' Then said Captain Maroon, when that wouldn't suit, 'Now, I'll tell what I'll do with you. You shall get me a good bill at four months, made payable at a banking-house, for the other twenty!' Then said Captain Maroon, when *that* wouldn't suit, 'Now, come; Here's the last I've got to say to you. You shall give me another ten down, and I'll run my pen clean through it.' Then said Captain Maroon when *that* wouldn't suit, 'Now, I'll tell you what it is, and this shuts it up; he has used me bad, but I'll let him off for another five down and a bottle of wine; and if you mean done, say done, and if you don't like it, leave it.' Finally said Captain Maroon, when *that* wouldn't suit either, 'Hand over, then!' – And in consideration of the first offer, gave a receipt in full and discharged the prisoner.

‘Mr Plornish,’ said Arthur, ‘I trust to you, if you please, to keep my secret. If you will undertake to let the young man know that he is free, and to tell him that you were employed to compound for the debt by some one whom you are not at liberty to name, you will not only do me a service, but may do him one, and his sister also.’

‘The last reason, sir,’ said Plornish, ‘would be quite sufficient. Your wishes shall be attended to.’

‘A Friend has obtained his discharge, you can say if you please. A Friend who hopes that for his sister’s sake, if for no one else’s, he will make good use of his liberty.’

‘Your wishes, sir, shall be attended to.’

‘And if you will be so good, in your better knowledge of the family, as to communicate freely with me, and to point out to me any means by which you think I may be delicately and really useful to Little Dorrit, I shall feel under an obligation to you.’

‘Don’t name it, sir,’ returned Plornish, ‘it’ll be ekally a pleasure an a – it’l be ekally a pleasure and a – ’ Finding himself unable to balance his sentence after two efforts, Mr Plornish wisely dropped it. He took Clennam’s card and appropriate pecuniary compliment.

He was earnest to finish his commission at once, and his Principal was in the same mind. So his Principal offered to set him down at the Marshalsea Gate, and they drove in that direction over Blackfriars Bridge. On the way, Arthur elicited from his new friend a confused summary of the interior life of

Bleeding Heart Yard. They was all hard up there, Mr Plornish said, uncommon hard up, to be sure. Well, he couldn't say how it was; he didn't know as anybody *could* say how it was; all he know'd was, that so it was. When a man felt, on his own back and in his own belly, that poor he was, that man (Mr Plornish gave it as his decided belief) know'd well that he was poor somehow or another, and you couldn't talk it out of him, no more than you could talk Beef into him. Then you see, some people as was better off said, and a good many such people lived pretty close up to the mark themselves if not beyond it so he'd heerd, that they was 'improvident' (that was the favourite word) down the Yard. For instance, if they see a man with his wife and children going to Hampton Court in a Wan, perhaps once in a year, they says, 'Hallo! I thought you was poor, my improvident friend!' Why, Lord, how hard it was upon a man! What was a man to do? He couldn't go mollancholy mad, and even if he did, you wouldn't be the better for it. In Mr Plornish's judgment you would be the worse for it. Yet you seemed to want to make a man mollancholy mad. You was always at it – if not with your right hand, with your left. What was they a doing in the Yard? Why, take a look at 'em and see. There was the girls and their mothers a working at their sewing, or their shoe-binding, or their trimming, or their waistcoat making, day and night and night and day, and not more than able to keep body and soul together after all – often not so much. There was people of pretty well all sorts of trades you could name, all wanting to work, and yet

not able to get it. There was old people, after working all their lives, going and being shut up in the workhouse, much worse fed and lodged and treated altogether, than – Mr Plornish said manufacturers, but appeared to mean malefactors. Why, a man didn't know where to turn himself for a crumb of comfort. As to who was to blame for it, Mr Plornish didn't know who was to blame for it. He could tell you who suffered, but he couldn't tell you whose fault it was. It wasn't *his* place to find out, and who'd mind what he said, if he did find out? He only know'd that it wasn't put right by them what undertook that line of business, and that it didn't come right of itself. And, in brief, his illogical opinion was, that if you couldn't do nothing for him, you had better take nothing from him for doing of it; so far as he could make out, that was about what it come to. Thus, in a prolix, gently-growling, foolish way, did Plornish turn the tangled skein of his estate about and about, like a blind man who was trying to find some beginning or end to it; until they reached the prison gate. There, he left his Principal alone; to wonder, as he rode away, how many thousand Plornishes there might be within a day or two's journey of the Circumlocution Office, playing sundry curious variations on the same tune, which were not known by ear in that glorious institution.

CHAPTER 13. Patriarchal

The mention of Mr Casby again revived in Clennam's memory the smouldering embers of curiosity and interest which Mrs Flintwinch had fanned on the night of his arrival. Flora Casby had been the beloved of his boyhood; and Flora was the daughter and only child of wooden-headed old Christopher (so he was still occasionally spoken of by some irreverent spirits who had had dealings with him, and in whom familiarity had bred its proverbial result perhaps), who was reputed to be rich in weekly tenants, and to get a good quantity of blood out of the stones of several unpromising courts and alleys.

After some days of inquiry and research, Arthur Clennam became convinced that the case of the Father of the Marshalsea was indeed a hopeless one, and sorrowfully resigned the idea of helping him to freedom again. He had no hopeful inquiry to make at present, concerning Little Dorrit either; but he argued with himself that it might – for anything he knew – it might be serviceable to the poor child, if he renewed this acquaintance. It is hardly necessary to add that beyond all doubt he would have presented himself at Mr Casby's door, if there had been no Little Dorrit in existence; for we all know how we all deceive ourselves – that is to say, how people in general, our profounder selves excepted, deceive themselves – as to motives of action.

With a comfortable impression upon him, and quite an honest

one in its way, that he was still patronising Little Dorrit in doing what had no reference to her, he found himself one afternoon at the corner of Mr Casby's street. Mr Casby lived in a street in the Gray's Inn Road, which had set off from that thoroughfare with the intention of running at one heat down into the valley, and up again to the top of Pentonville Hill; but which had run itself out of breath in twenty yards, and had stood still ever since. There is no such place in that part now; but it remained there for many years, looking with a baulked countenance at the wilderness patched with unfruitful gardens and pimpled with eruptive summerhouses, that it had meant to run over in no time.

'The house,' thought Clennam, as he crossed to the door, 'is as little changed as my mother's, and looks almost as gloomy. But the likeness ends outside. I know its staid repose within. The smell of its jars of old rose-leaves and lavender seems to come upon me even here.'

When his knock at the bright brass knocker of obsolete shape brought a woman-servant to the door, those faded scents in truth saluted him like wintry breath that had a faint remembrance in it of the bygone spring. He stepped into the sober, silent, air-tight house – one might have fancied it to have been stifled by Mutes in the Eastern manner – and the door, closing again, seemed to shut out sound and motion. The furniture was formal, grave, and quaker-like, but well-kept; and had as prepossessing an aspect as anything, from a human creature to a wooden stool, that is meant for much use and is preserved for little, can ever wear. There was

a grave clock, ticking somewhere up the staircase; and there was a songless bird in the same direction, pecking at his cage, as if he were ticking too. The parlour-fire ticked in the grate. There was only one person on the parlour-hearth, and the loud watch in his pocket ticked audibly.

The servant-maid had ticked the two words 'Mr Clennam' so softly that she had not been heard; and he consequently stood, within the door she had closed, unnoticed. The figure of a man advanced in life, whose smooth grey eyebrows seemed to move to the ticking as the fire-light flickered on them, sat in an arm-chair, with his list shoes on the rug, and his thumbs slowly revolving over one another. This was old Christopher Casby – recognisable at a glance – as unchanged in twenty years and upward as his own solid furniture – as little touched by the influence of the varying seasons as the old rose-leaves and old lavender in his porcelain jars.

Perhaps there never was a man, in this troublesome world, so troublesome for the imagination to picture as a boy. And yet he had changed very little in his progress through life. Confronting him, in the room in which he sat, was a boy's portrait, which anybody seeing him would have identified as Master Christopher Casby, aged ten: though disguised with a haymaking rake, for which he had had, at any time, as much taste or use as for a diving-bell; and sitting (on one of his own legs) upon a bank of violets, moved to precocious contemplation by the spire of a village church. There was the same smooth face and forehead,

the same calm blue eye, the same placid air. The shining bald head, which looked so very large because it shone so much; and the long grey hair at its sides and back, like floss silk or spun glass, which looked so very benevolent because it was never cut; were not, of course, to be seen in the boy as in the old man. Nevertheless, in the Seraphic creature with the haymaking rake, were clearly to be discerned the rudiments of the Patriarch with the list shoes.

Patriarch was the name which many people delighted to give him. Various old ladies in the neighbourhood spoke of him as The Last of the Patriarchs. So grey, so slow, so quiet, so impassionate, so very bumpy in the head, Patriarch was the word for him. He had been accosted in the streets, and respectfully solicited to become a Patriarch for painters and for sculptors; with so much importunity, in sooth, that it would appear to be beyond the Fine Arts to remember the points of a Patriarch, or to invent one. Philanthropists of both sexes had asked who he was, and on being informed, 'Old Christopher Casby, formerly Town-agent to Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle,' had cried in a rapture of disappointment, 'Oh! why, with that head, is he not a benefactor to his species! Oh! why, with that head, is he not a father to the orphan and a friend to the friendless!' With that head, however, he remained old Christopher Casby, proclaimed by common report rich in house property; and with that head, he now sat in his silent parlour. Indeed it would be the height of unreason to expect him to be sitting there without that head.

Arthur Clennam moved to attract his attention, and the grey eyebrows turned towards him.

'I beg your pardon,' said Clennam, 'I fear you did not hear me announced?'

'No, sir, I did not. Did you wish to see me, sir?'

'I wished to pay my respects.'

Mr Casby seemed a feather's weight disappointed by the last words, having perhaps prepared himself for the visitor's wishing to pay something else. 'Have I the pleasure, sir,' he proceeded – 'take a chair, if you please – have I the pleasure of knowing – ? Ah! truly, yes, I think I have! I believe I am not mistaken in supposing that I am acquainted with those features? I think I address a gentleman of whose return to this country I was informed by Mr Flintwinch?'

'That is your present visitor.'

'Really! Mr Clennam?'

'No other, Mr Casby.'

'Mr Clennam, I am glad to see you. How have you been since we met?'

Without thinking it worth while to explain that in the course of some quarter of a century he had experienced occasional slight fluctuations in his health and spirits, Clennam answered generally that he had never been better, or something equally to the purpose; and shook hands with the possessor of 'that head' as it shed its patriarchal light upon him.

'We are older, Mr Clennam,' said Christopher Casby.

‘We are – not younger,’ said Clennam. After this wise remark he felt that he was scarcely shining with brilliancy, and became aware that he was nervous.

‘And your respected father,’ said Mr Casby, ‘is no more! I was grieved to hear it, Mr Clennam, I was grieved.’

Arthur replied in the usual way that he felt infinitely obliged to him.

‘There was a time,’ said Mr Casby, ‘when your parents and myself were not on friendly terms. There was a little family misunderstanding among us. Your respected mother was rather jealous of her son, maybe; when I say her son, I mean your worthy self, your worthy self.’

His smooth face had a bloom upon it like ripe wall-fruit. What with his blooming face, and that head, and his blue eyes, he seemed to be delivering sentiments of rare wisdom and virtue. In like manner, his physiognomical expression seemed to teem with benignity. Nobody could have said where the wisdom was, or where the virtue was, or where the benignity was; but they all seemed to be somewhere about him.

‘Those times, however,’ pursued Mr Casby, ‘are past and gone, past and gone. I do myself the pleasure of making a visit to your respected mother occasionally, and of admiring the fortitude and strength of mind with which she bears her trials, bears her trials.’

When he made one of these little repetitions, sitting with his hands crossed before him, he did it with his head on one side, and a gentle smile, as if he had something in his thoughts too

sweetly profound to be put into words. As if he denied himself the pleasure of uttering it, lest he should soar too high; and his meekness therefore preferred to be unmeaning.

'I have heard that you were kind enough on one of those occasions,' said Arthur, catching at the opportunity as it drifted past him, 'to mention Little Dorrit to my mother.'

'Little – ? Dorrit? That's the seamstress who was mentioned to me by a small tenant of mine? Yes, yes. Dorrit? That's the name. Ah, yes, yes! You call her Little Dorrit?'

No road in that direction. Nothing came of the cross-cut. It led no further.

'My daughter Flora,' said Mr Casby, 'as you may have heard probably, Mr Clennam, was married and established in life, several years ago. She had the misfortune to lose her husband when she had been married a few months. She resides with me again. She will be glad to see you, if you will permit me to let her know that you are here.'

'By all means,' returned Clennam. 'I should have preferred the request, if your kindness had not anticipated me.'

Upon this Mr Casby rose up in his list shoes, and with a slow, heavy step (he was of an elephantine build), made for the door. He had a long wide-skirted bottle-green coat on, and a bottle-green pair of trousers, and a bottle-green waistcoat. The Patriarchs were not dressed in bottle-green broadcloth, and yet his clothes looked patriarchal.

He had scarcely left the room, and allowed the ticking to

become audible again, when a quick hand turned a latchkey in the house-door, opened it, and shut it. Immediately afterwards, a quick and eager short dark man came into the room with so much way upon him that he was within a foot of Clennam before he could stop.

'Halloa!' he said.

Clennam saw no reason why he should not say 'Halloa!' too.

'What's the matter?' said the short dark man.

'I have not heard that anything is the matter,' returned Clennam.

'Where's Mr Casby?' asked the short dark man, looking about.

'He will be here directly, if you want him.'

'*I* want him?' said the short dark man. 'Don't you?'

This elicited a word or two of explanation from Clennam, during the delivery of which the short dark man held his breath and looked at him. He was dressed in black and rusty iron grey; had jet black beads of eyes; a scrubby little black chin; wiry black hair striking out from his head in prongs, like forks or hair-pins; and a complexion that was very dingy by nature, or very dirty by art, or a compound of nature and art. He had dirty hands and dirty broken nails, and looked as if he had been in the coals; he was in a perspiration, and snorted and sniffed and puffed and blew, like a little labouring steam-engine.

'Oh!' said he, when Arthur told him how he came to be there. 'Very well. That's right. If he should ask for Pancks, will you be so good as to say that Pancks is come in?' And so, with a snort

and a puff, he worked out by another door.

Now, in the old days at home, certain audacious doubts respecting the last of the Patriarchs, which were afloat in the air, had, by some forgotten means, come in contact with Arthur's sensorium. He was aware of motes and specks of suspicion in the atmosphere of that time; seen through which medium, Christopher Casby was a mere Inn signpost, without any Inn – an invitation to rest and be thankful, when there was no place to put up at, and nothing whatever to be thankful for. He knew that some of these specks even represented Christopher as capable of harbouring designs in 'that head,' and as being a crafty impostor. Other motes there were which showed him as a heavy, selfish, drifting Booby, who, having stumbled, in the course of his unwieldy jostlings against other men, on the discovery that to get through life with ease and credit, he had but to hold his tongue, keep the bald part of his head well polished, and leave his hair alone, had had just cunning enough to seize the idea and stick to it. It was said that his being town-agent to Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle was referable, not to his having the least business capacity, but to his looking so supremely benignant that nobody could suppose the property screwed or jobbed under such a man; also, that for similar reasons he now got more money out of his own wretched lettings, unquestioned, than anybody with a less nobby and less shining crown could possibly have done. In a word, it was represented (Clennam called to mind, alone in the ticking parlour) that many people select their models, much as

the painters, just now mentioned, select theirs; and that, whereas in the Royal Academy some evil old ruffian of a Dog-stealer will annually be found embodying all the cardinal virtues, on account of his eyelashes, or his chin, or his legs (thereby planting thorns of confusion in the breasts of the more observant students of nature), so, in the great social Exhibition, accessories are often accepted in lieu of the internal character.

Calling these things to mind, and ranging Mr Pancks in a row with them, Arthur Clennam leaned this day to the opinion, without quite deciding on it, that the last of the Patriarchs was the drifting Booby aforesaid, with the one idea of keeping the bald part of his head highly polished: and that, much as an unwieldy ship in the Thames river may sometimes be seen heavily driving with the tide, broadside on, stern first, in its own way and in the way of everything else, though making a great show of navigation, when all of a sudden, a little coaly steam-tug will bear down upon it, take it in tow, and bustle off with it; similarly the cumbrous Patriarch had been taken in tow by the snorting Pancks, and was now following in the wake of that dingy little craft.

The return of Mr Casby with his daughter Flora, put an end to these meditations. Clennam's eyes no sooner fell upon the subject of his old passion than it shivered and broke to pieces.

Most men will be found sufficiently true to themselves to be true to an old idea. It is no proof of an inconstant mind, but exactly the opposite, when the idea will not bear close

comparison with the reality, and the contrast is a fatal shock to it. Such was Clennam's case. In his youth he had ardently loved this woman, and had heaped upon her all the locked-up wealth of his affection and imagination. That wealth had been, in his desert home, like Robinson Crusoe's money; exchangeable with no one, lying idle in the dark to rust, until he poured it out for her. Ever since that memorable time, though he had, until the night of his arrival, as completely dismissed her from any association with his Present or Future as if she had been dead (which she might easily have been for anything he knew), he had kept the old fancy of the Past unchanged, in its old sacred place. And now, after all, the last of the Patriarchs coolly walked into the parlour, saying in effect, 'Be good enough to throw it down and dance upon it. This is Flora.'

Flora, always tall, had grown to be very broad too, and short of breath; but that was not much. Flora, whom he had left a lily, had become a peony; but that was not much. Flora, who had seemed enchanting in all she said and thought, was diffuse and silly. That was much. Flora, who had been spoiled and artless long ago, was determined to be spoiled and artless now. That was a fatal blow.

This is Flora!

'I am sure,' giggled Flora, tossing her head with a caricature of her girlish manner, such as a mummer might have presented at her own funeral, if she had lived and died in classical antiquity, 'I am ashamed to see Mr Clennam, I am a mere fright, I know he'll find me fearfully changed, I am actually an old woman, it's

shocking to be found out, it's really shocking!'

He assured her that she was just what he had expected and that time had not stood still with himself.

'Oh! But with a gentleman it's so different and really you look so amazingly well that you have no right to say anything of the kind, while, as to me, you know – oh!' cried Flora with a little scream, 'I am dreadful!'

The Patriarch, apparently not yet understanding his own part in the drama under representation, glowed with vacant serenity.

'But if we talk of not having changed,' said Flora, who, whatever she said, never once came to a full stop, 'look at Papa, is not Papa precisely what he was when you went away, isn't it cruel and unnatural of Papa to be such a reproach to his own child, if we go on in this way much longer people who don't know us will begin to suppose that I am Papa's Mama!'

That must be a long time hence, Arthur considered.

'Oh Mr Clennam you insincerest of creatures,' said Flora, 'I perceive already you have not lost your old way of paying compliments, your old way when you used to pretend to be so sentimentally struck you know – at least I don't mean that, I – oh I don't know what I mean!' Here Flora tittered confusedly, and gave him one of her old glances.

The Patriarch, as if he now began to perceive that his part in the piece was to get off the stage as soon as might be, rose, and went to the door by which Pancks had worked out, hailing that Tug by name. He received an answer from some little Dock

beyond, and was towed out of sight directly.

'You mustn't think of going yet,' said Flora – Arthur had looked at his hat, being in a ludicrous dismay, and not knowing what to do: 'you could never be so unkind as to think of going, Arthur – I mean Mr Arthur – or I suppose Mr Clennam would be far more proper – but I am sure I don't know what I am saying – without a word about the dear old days gone for ever, when I come to think of it I dare say it would be much better not to speak of them and it's highly probable that you have some much more agreeable engagement and pray let Me be the last person in the world to interfere with it though there *was* a time, but I am running into nonsense again.'

Was it possible that Flora could have been such a chatterer in the days she referred to? Could there have been anything like her present disjointed volubility in the fascinations that had captivated him?

'Indeed I have little doubt,' said Flora, running on with astonishing speed, and pointing her conversation with nothing but commas, and very few of them, 'that you are married to some Chinese lady, being in China so long and being in business and naturally desirous to settle and extend your connection nothing was more likely than that you should propose to a Chinese lady and nothing was more natural I am sure than that the Chinese lady should accept you and think herself very well off too, I only hope she's not a Pagodian dissenter.'

'I am not,' returned Arthur, smiling in spite of himself,

‘married to any lady, Flora.’

‘Oh good gracious me I hope you never kept yourself a bachelor so long on my account!’ tittered Flora; ‘but of course you never did why should you, pray don’t answer, I don’t know where I’m running to, oh do tell me something about the Chinese ladies whether their eyes are really so long and narrow always putting me in mind of mother-of-pearl fish at cards and do they really wear tails down their back and plaited too or is it only the men, and when they pull their hair so very tight off their foreheads don’t they hurt themselves, and why do they stick little bells all over their bridges and temples and hats and things or don’t they really do it?’ Flora gave him another of her old glances. Instantly she went on again, as if he had spoken in reply for some time.

‘Then it’s all true and they really do! good gracious Arthur! – pray excuse me – old habit – Mr Clennam far more proper – what a country to live in for so long a time, and with so many lanterns and umbrellas too how very dark and wet the climate ought to be and no doubt actually is, and the sums of money that must be made by those two trades where everybody carries them and hangs them everywhere, the little shoes too and the feet screwed back in infancy is quite surprising, what a traveller you are!’

In his ridiculous distress, Clennam received another of the old glances without in the least knowing what to do with it.

‘Dear dear,’ said Flora, ‘only to think of the changes at home Arthur – cannot overcome it, and seems so natural, Mr Clennam far more proper – since you became familiar with the Chinese

customs and language which I am persuaded you speak like a Native if not better for you were always quick and clever though immensely difficult no doubt, I am sure the tea chests alone would kill me if I tried, such changes Arthur – I am doing it again, seems so natural, most improper – as no one could have believed, who could have ever imagined Mrs Finching when I can't imagine it myself!'

'Is that your married name?' asked Arthur, struck, in the midst of all this, by a certain warmth of heart that expressed itself in her tone when she referred, however oddly, to the youthful relation in which they had stood to one another. 'Finching?'

'Finching oh yes isn't it a dreadful name, but as Mr F. said when he proposed to me which he did seven times and handsomely consented I must say to be what he used to call on liking twelve months, after all, he wasn't answerable for it and couldn't help it could he, Excellent man, not at all like you but excellent man!'

Flora had at last talked herself out of breath for one moment. One moment; for she recovered breath in the act of raising a minute corner of her pocket-handkerchief to her eye, as a tribute to the ghost of the departed Mr F., and began again.

'No one could dispute, Arthur – Mr Clennam – that it's quite right you should be formally friendly to me under the altered circumstances and indeed you couldn't be anything else, at least I suppose not you ought to know, but I can't help recalling that there *was* a time when things were very different.'

‘My dear Mrs Finching,’ Arthur began, struck by the good tone again.

‘Oh not that nasty ugly name, say Flora!’

‘Flora. I assure you, Flora, I am happy in seeing you once more, and in finding that, like me, you have not forgotten the old foolish dreams, when we saw all before us in the light of our youth and hope.’

‘You don’t seem so,’ pouted Flora, ‘you take it very coolly, but however I know you are disappointed in me, I suppose the Chinese ladies – Mandarinesses if you call them so – are the cause or perhaps I am the cause myself, it’s just as likely.’

‘No, no,’ Clennam entreated, ‘don’t say that.’

‘Oh I must you know,’ said Flora, in a positive tone, ‘what nonsense not to, I know I am not what you expected, I know that very well.’

In the midst of her rapidity, she had found that out with the quick perception of a cleverer woman. The inconsistent and profoundly unreasonable way in which she instantly went on, nevertheless, to interweave their long-abandoned boy and girl relations with their present interview, made Clennam feel as if he were light-headed.

‘One remark,’ said Flora, giving their conversation, without the slightest notice and to the great terror of Clennam, the tone of a love-quarrel, ‘I wish to make, one explanation I wish to offer, when your Mama came and made a scene of it with my Papa and when I was called down into the little breakfast-room where they

were looking at one another with your Mama's parasol between them seated on two chairs like mad bulls what was I to do?'

'My dear Mrs Finching,' urged Clennam – 'all so long ago and so long concluded, is it worth while seriously to – '

'I can't Arthur,' returned Flora, 'be denounced as heartless by the whole society of China without setting myself right when I have the opportunity of doing so, and you must be very well aware that there was Paul and Virginia which had to be returned and which was returned without note or comment, not that I mean to say you could have written to me watched as I was but if it had only come back with a red wafer on the cover I should have known that it meant Come to Pekin Nankeen and What's the third place, barefoot.'

'My dear Mrs Finching, you were not to blame, and I never blamed you. We were both too young, too dependent and helpless, to do anything but accept our separation. – Pray think how long ago,' gently remonstrated Arthur.

'One more remark,' proceeded Flora with unslackened volubility, 'I wish to make, one more explanation I wish to offer, for five days I had a cold in the head from crying which I passed entirely in the back drawing-room – there is the back drawing-room still on the first floor and still at the back of the house to confirm my words – when that dreary period had passed a lull succeeded years rolled on and Mr F. became acquainted with us at a mutual friend's, he was all attention he called next day he soon began to call three evenings a week and to send in little

things for supper it was not love on Mr F.'s part it was adoration, Mr F. proposed with the full approval of Papa and what could I do?'

'Nothing whatever,' said Arthur, with the cheerfulest readiness, 'but what you did. Let an old friend assure you of his full conviction that you did quite right.'

'One last remark,' proceeded Flora, rejecting commonplace life with a wave of her hand, 'I wish to make, one last explanation I wish to offer, there *was* a time ere Mr F. first paid attentions incapable of being mistaken, but that is past and was not to be, dear Mr Clennam you no longer wear a golden chain you are free I trust you may be happy, here is Papa who is always tiresome and putting in his nose everywhere where he is not wanted.'

With these words, and with a hasty gesture fraught with timid caution – such a gesture had Clennam's eyes been familiar with in the old time – poor Flora left herself at eighteen years of age, a long long way behind again; and came to a full stop at last.

Or rather, she left about half of herself at eighteen years of age behind, and grafted the rest on to the relict of the late Mr F.; thus making a moral mermaid of herself, which her once boy-lover contemplated with feelings wherein his sense of the sorrowful and his sense of the comical were curiously blended.

For example. As if there were a secret understanding between herself and Clennam of the most thrilling nature; as if the first of a train of post-chaises and four, extending all the way to Scotland, were at that moment round the corner; and as if she

couldn't (and wouldn't) have walked into the Parish Church with him, under the shade of the family umbrella, with the Patriarchal blessing on her head, and the perfect concurrence of all mankind; Flora comforted her soul with agonies of mysterious signalling, expressing dread of discovery. With the sensation of becoming more and more light-headed every minute, Clennam saw the relict of the late Mr F. enjoying herself in the most wonderful manner, by putting herself and him in their old places, and going through all the old performances – now, when the stage was dusty, when the scenery was faded, when the youthful actors were dead, when the orchestra was empty, when the lights were out. And still, through all this grotesque revival of what he remembered as having once been prettily natural to her, he could not but feel that it revived at sight of him, and that there was a tender memory in it.

The Patriarch insisted on his staying to dinner, and Flora signalled 'Yes!' Clennam so wished he could have done more than stay to dinner – so heartily wished he could have found the Flora that had been, or that never had been – that he thought the least atonement he could make for the disappointment he almost felt ashamed of, was to give himself up to the family desire. Therefore, he stayed to dinner.

Pancks dined with them. Pancks steamed out of his little dock at a quarter before six, and bore straight down for the Patriarch, who happened to be then driving, in an inane manner, through a stagnant account of Bleeding Heart Yard. Pancks instantly made

fast to him and hauled him out.

'Bleeding Heart Yard?' said Pancks, with a puff and a snort. 'It's a troublesome property. Don't pay you badly, but rents are very hard to get there. You have more trouble with that one place than with all the places belonging to you.'

Just as the big ship in tow gets the credit, with most spectators, of being the powerful object, so the Patriarch usually seemed to have said himself whatever Pancks said for him.

'Indeed?' returned Clennam, upon whom this impression was so efficiently made by a mere gleam of the polished head that he spoke the ship instead of the Tug. 'The people are so poor there?'

'*You* can't say, you know,' snorted Pancks, taking one of his dirty hands out of his rusty iron-grey pockets to bite his nails, if he could find any, and turning his beads of eyes upon his employer, 'whether they're poor or not. They say they are, but they all say that. When a man says he's rich, you're generally sure he isn't. Besides, if they *are* poor, you can't help it. You'd be poor yourself if you didn't get your rents.'

'True enough,' said Arthur.

'You're not going to keep open house for all the poor of London,' pursued Pancks. 'You're not going to lodge 'em for nothing. You're not going to open your gates wide and let 'em come free. Not if you know it, you ain't.'

Mr Casby shook his head, in Placid and benignant generality.

'If a man takes a room of you at half-a-crown a week, and when the week comes round hasn't got the half-crown, you say

to that man, Why have you got the room, then? If you haven't got the one thing, why have you got the other? What have you been and done with your money? What do you mean by it? What are you up to? That's what *you* say to a man of that sort; and if you didn't say it, more shame for you!' Mr Pancks here made a singular and startling noise, produced by a strong blowing effort in the region of the nose, unattended by any result but that acoustic one.

'You have some extent of such property about the east and north-east here, I believe?' said Clennam, doubtful which of the two to address.

'Oh, pretty well,' said Pancks. 'You're not particular to east or north-east, any point of the compass will do for you. What you want is a good investment and a quick return. You take it where you can find it. You ain't nice as to situation – not you.'

There was a fourth and most original figure in the Patriarchal tent, who also appeared before dinner. This was an amazing little old woman, with a face like a staring wooden doll too cheap for expression, and a stiff yellow wig perched unevenly on the top of her head, as if the child who owned the doll had driven a tack through it anywhere, so that it only got fastened on. Another remarkable thing in this little old woman was, that the same child seemed to have damaged her face in two or three places with some blunt instrument in the nature of a spoon; her countenance, and particularly the tip of her nose, presenting the phenomena of several dints, generally answering to the bowl of that article.

A further remarkable thing in this little old woman was, that she had no name but Mr F.'s Aunt.

She broke upon the visitor's view under the following circumstances: Flora said when the first dish was being put on the table, perhaps Mr Clennam might not have heard that Mr F. had left her a legacy? Clennam in return implied his hope that Mr F. had endowed the wife whom he adored, with the greater part of his worldly substance, if not with all. Flora said, oh yes, she didn't mean that, Mr F. had made a beautiful will, but he had left her as a separate legacy, his Aunt. She then went out of the room to fetch the legacy, and, on her return, rather triumphantly presented 'Mr F.'s Aunt.'

The major characteristics discoverable by the stranger in Mr F.'s Aunt, were extreme severity and grim taciturnity; sometimes interrupted by a propensity to offer remarks in a deep warning voice, which, being totally uncalled for by anything said by anybody, and traceable to no association of ideas, confounded and terrified the Mind. Mr F.'s Aunt may have thrown in these observations on some system of her own, and it may have been ingenious, or even subtle: but the key to it was wanted.

The neatly-served and well-cooked dinner (for everything about the Patriarchal household promoted quiet digestion) began with some soup, some fried soles, a butter-boat of shrimp sauce, and a dish of potatoes. The conversation still turned on the receipt of rents. Mr F.'s Aunt, after regarding the company for ten minutes with a malevolent gaze, delivered the following

fearful remark:

'When we lived at Henley, Barnes's gander was stole by tinkers.'

Mr Pancks courageously nodded his head and said, 'All right, ma'am.' But the effect of this mysterious communication upon Clennam was absolutely to frighten him. And another circumstance invested this old lady with peculiar terrors. Though she was always staring, she never acknowledged that she saw any individual. The polite and attentive stranger would desire, say, to consult her inclinations on the subject of potatoes. His expressive action would be hopelessly lost upon her, and what could he do? No man could say, 'Mr F.'s Aunt, will you permit me?' Every man retired from the spoon, as Clennam did, cowed and baffled.

There was mutton, a steak, and an apple-pie – nothing in the remotest way connected with ganders – and the dinner went on like a disenchanted feast, as it truly was. Once upon a time Clennam had sat at that table taking no heed of anything but Flora; now the principal heed he took of Flora was to observe, against his will, that she was very fond of porter, that she combined a great deal of sherry with sentiment, and that if she were a little overgrown, it was upon substantial grounds. The last of the Patriarchs had always been a mighty eater, and he disposed of an immense quantity of solid food with the benignity of a good soul who was feeding some one else. Mr Pancks, who was always in a hurry, and who referred at intervals to a little dirty notebook which he kept beside him (perhaps containing the names of the

defaulters he meant to look up by way of dessert), took in his victuals much as if he were coaling; with a good deal of noise, a good deal of dropping about, and a puff and a snort occasionally, as if he were nearly ready to steam away.

All through dinner, Flora combined her present appetite for eating and drinking with her past appetite for romantic love, in a way that made Clennam afraid to lift his eyes from his plate; since he could not look towards her without receiving some glance of mysterious meaning or warning, as if they were engaged in a plot. Mr F.'s Aunt sat silently defying him with an aspect of the greatest bitterness, until the removal of the cloth and the appearance of the decanters, when she originated another observation – struck into the conversation like a clock, without consulting anybody.

Flora had just said, 'Mr Clennam, will you give me a glass of port for Mr F.'s Aunt?'

'The Monument near London Bridge,' that lady instantly proclaimed, 'was put up arter the Great Fire of London; and the Great Fire of London was not the fire in which your uncle George's workshops was burned down.'

Mr Pancks, with his former courage, said, 'Indeed, ma'am? All right!' But appearing to be incensed by imaginary contradiction, or other ill-usage, Mr F.'s Aunt, instead of relapsing into silence, made the following additional proclamation:

'I hate a fool!'

She imparted to this sentiment, in itself almost Solomonic, so extremely injurious and personal a character by levelling it straight at the visitor's head, that it became necessary to lead Mr F.'s Aunt from the room. This was quietly done by Flora; Mr F.'s Aunt offering no resistance, but inquiring on her way out, 'What he come there for, then?' with implacable animosity.

When Flora returned, she explained that her legacy was a clever old lady, but was sometimes a little singular, and 'took dislikes' – peculiarities of which Flora seemed to be proud rather than otherwise. As Flora's good nature shone in the case, Clennam had no fault to find with the old lady for eliciting it, now that he was relieved from the terrors of her presence; and they took a glass or two of wine in peace. Foreseeing then that the Pancks would shortly get under weigh, and that the Patriarch would go to sleep, he pleaded the necessity of visiting his mother, and asked Mr Pancks in which direction he was going?

'Citywards, sir,' said Pancks.

'Shall we walk together?' said Arthur.

'Quite agreeable,' said Pancks.

Meanwhile Flora was murmuring in rapid snatches for his ear, that there was a time and that the past was a yawning gulf however and that a golden chain no longer bound him and that she revered the memory of the late Mr F. and that she should be at home to-morrow at half-past one and that the decrees of Fate were beyond recall and that she considered nothing so improbable as that he ever walked on the north-west side of

Gray's-Inn Gardens at exactly four o'clock in the afternoon. He tried at parting to give his hand in frankness to the existing Flora – not the vanished Flora, or the mermaid – but Flora wouldn't have it, couldn't have it, was wholly destitute of the power of separating herself and him from their bygone characters. He left the house miserably enough; and so much more light-headed than ever, that if it had not been his good fortune to be towed away, he might, for the first quarter of an hour, have drifted anywhere.

When he began to come to himself, in the cooler air and the absence of Flora, he found Pancks at full speed, cropping such scanty pasturage of nails as he could find, and snorting at intervals. These, in conjunction with one hand in his pocket and his roughened hat hind side before, were evidently the conditions under which he reflected.

'A fresh night!' said Arthur.

'Yes, it's pretty fresh,' assented Pancks. 'As a stranger you feel the climate more than I do, I dare say. Indeed I haven't got time to feel it.'

'You lead such a busy life?'

'Yes, I have always some of 'em to look up, or something to look after. But I like business,' said Pancks, getting on a little faster. 'What's a man made for?'

'For nothing else?' said Clennam.

Pancks put the counter question, 'What else?' It packed up, in the smallest compass, a weight that had rested on Clennam's life; and he made no answer.

‘That’s what I ask our weekly tenants,’ said Pancks. ‘Some of ‘em will pull long faces to me, and say, Poor as you see us, master, we’re always grinding, drudging, toiling, every minute we’re awake. I say to them, What else are you made for? It shuts them up. They haven’t a word to answer. What else are you made for? That clinches it.’

‘Ah dear, dear, dear!’ sighed Clennam.

‘Here am I,’ said Pancks, pursuing his argument with the weekly tenant. ‘What else do you suppose I think I am made for? Nothing. Rattle me out of bed early, set me going, give me as short a time as you like to bolt my meals in, and keep me at it. Keep me always at it, and I’ll keep you always at it, you keep somebody else always at it. There you are with the Whole Duty of Man in a commercial country.’

When they had walked a little further in silence, Clennam said: ‘Have you no taste for anything, Mr Pancks?’

‘What’s taste?’ drily retorted Pancks.

‘Let us say inclination.’

‘I have an inclination to get money, sir,’ said Pancks, ‘if you will show me how.’ He blew off that sound again, and it occurred to his companion for the first time that it was his way of laughing. He was a singular man in all respects; he might not have been quite in earnest, but that the short, hard, rapid manner in which he shot out these cinders of principles, as if it were done by mechanical revolvency, seemed irreconcilable with banter.

‘You are no great reader, I suppose?’ said Clennam.

‘Never read anything but letters and accounts. Never collect anything but advertisements relative to next of kin. If *that’s* a taste, I have got that. You’re not of the Clennams of Cornwall, Mr Clennam?’

‘Not that I ever heard of.’

‘I know you’re not. I asked your mother, sir. She has too much character to let a chance escape her.’

‘Supposing I had been of the Clennams of Cornwall?’

‘You’d have heard of something to your advantage.’

‘Indeed! I have heard of little enough to my advantage for some time.’

‘There’s a Cornish property going a begging, sir, and not a Cornish Clennam to have it for the asking,’ said Pancks, taking his note-book from his breast pocket and putting it in again. ‘I turn off here. I wish you good night.’

‘Good night!’ said Clennam. But the Tug, suddenly lightened, and untrammelled by having any weight in tow, was already puffing away into the distance.

They had crossed Smithfield together, and Clennam was left alone at the corner of Barbican. He had no intention of presenting himself in his mother’s dismal room that night, and could not have felt more depressed and cast away if he had been in a wilderness. He turned slowly down Aldersgate Street, and was pondering his way along towards Saint Paul’s, purposing to come into one of the great thoroughfares for the sake of their light and life, when a crowd of people flocked towards him on the same

pavement, and he stood aside against a shop to let them pass. As they came up, he made out that they were gathered around a something that was carried on men's shoulders. He soon saw that it was a litter, hastily made of a shutter or some such thing; and a recumbent figure upon it, and the scraps of conversation in the crowd, and a muddy bundle carried by one man, and a muddy hat carried by another, informed him that an accident had occurred. The litter stopped under a lamp before it had passed him half-a-dozen paces, for some readjustment of the burden; and, the crowd stopping too, he found himself in the midst of the array.

'An accident going to the Hospital?' he asked an old man beside him, who stood shaking his head, inviting conversation.

'Yes,' said the man, 'along of them Mails. They ought to be prosecuted and fined, them Mails. They come a racing out of Lad Lane and Wood Street at twelve or fourteen mile a hour, them Mails do. The only wonder is, that people ain't killed oftener by them Mails.'

'This person is not killed, I hope?'

'I don't know!' said the man, 'it an't for the want of a will in them Mails, if he an't.' The speaker having folded his arms, and set in comfortably to address his depreciation of them Mails to any of the bystanders who would listen, several voices, out of pure sympathy with the sufferer, confirmed him; one voice saying to Clennam, 'They're a public nuisance, them Mails, sir;' another, '*I* see one on 'em pull up within half a inch of a boy, last night;' another, '*I* see one on 'em go over a cat, sir – and it might

have been your own mother;' and all representing, by implication, that if he happened to possess any public influence, he could not use it better than against them Mails.

'Why, a native Englishman is put to it every night of his life, to save his life from them Mails,' argued the first old man; 'and *he* knows when they're a coming round the corner, to tear him limb from limb. What can you expect from a poor foreigner who don't know nothing about 'em!'

'Is this a foreigner?' said Clennam, leaning forward to look.

In the midst of such replies as 'Frenchman, sir,' 'Porteghee, sir,' 'Dutchman, sir,' 'Prooshan, sir,' and other conflicting testimony, he now heard a feeble voice asking, both in Italian and in French, for water. A general remark going round, in reply, of 'Ah, poor fellow, he says he'll never get over it; and no wonder!' Clennam begged to be allowed to pass, as he understood the poor creature. He was immediately handed to the front, to speak to him.

'First, he wants some water,' said he, looking round. (A dozen good fellows dispersed to get it.) 'Are you badly hurt, my friend?' he asked the man on the litter, in Italian.

'Yes, sir; yes, yes, yes. It's my leg, it's my leg. But it pleases me to hear the old music, though I am very bad.'

'You are a traveller! Stay! See, the water! Let me give you some.'

They had rested the litter on a pile of paving stones. It was at a convenient height from the ground, and by stooping he could

lightly raise the head with one hand and hold the glass to his lips with the other. A little, muscular, brown man, with black hair and white teeth. A lively face, apparently. Earrings in his ears.

'That's well. You are a traveller?'

'Surely, sir.'

'A stranger in this city?'

'Surely, surely, altogether. I am arrived this unhappy evening.'

'From what country?'

'Marseilles.'

'Why, see there! I also! Almost as much a stranger here as you, though born here, I came from Marseilles a little while ago. Don't be cast down.' The face looked up at him imploringly, as he rose from wiping it, and gently replaced the coat that covered the writhing figure. 'I won't leave you till you shall be well taken care of. Courage! You will be very much better half an hour hence.'

'Ah! Altro, Altro!' cried the poor little man, in a faintly incredulous tone; and as they took him up, hung out his right hand to give the forefinger a back-handed shake in the air.

Arthur Clennam turned; and walking beside the litter, and saying an encouraging word now and then, accompanied it to the neighbouring hospital of Saint Bartholomew. None of the crowd but the bearers and he being admitted, the disabled man was soon laid on a table in a cool, methodical way, and carefully examined by a surgeon who was as near at hand, and as ready to appear as Calamity herself. 'He hardly knows an English word,' said Clennam; 'is he badly hurt?'

‘Let us know all about it first,’ said the surgeon, continuing his examination with a businesslike delight in it, ‘before we pronounce.’

After trying the leg with a finger, and two fingers, and one hand and two hands, and over and under, and up and down, and in this direction and in that, and approvingly remarking on the points of interest to another gentleman who joined him, the surgeon at last clapped the patient on the shoulder, and said, ‘He won’t hurt. He’ll do very well. It’s difficult enough, but we shall not want him to part with his leg this time.’ Which Clennam interpreted to the patient, who was full of gratitude, and, in his demonstrative way, kissed both the interpreter’s hand and the surgeon’s several times.

‘It’s a serious injury, I suppose?’ said Clennam.

‘Ye-es,’ replied the surgeon, with the thoughtful pleasure of an artist contemplating the work upon his easel. ‘Yes, it’s enough. There’s a compound fracture above the knee, and a dislocation below. They are both of a beautiful kind.’ He gave the patient a friendly clap on the shoulder again, as if he really felt that he was a very good fellow indeed, and worthy of all commendation for having broken his leg in a manner interesting to science.

‘He speaks French?’ said the surgeon.

‘Oh yes, he speaks French.’

‘He’ll be at no loss here, then. – You have only to bear a little pain like a brave fellow, my friend, and to be thankful that all goes as well as it does,’ he added, in that tongue, ‘and you’ll walk

again to a marvel. Now, let us see whether there's anything else the matter, and how our ribs are?'

There was nothing else the matter, and our ribs were sound. Clennam remained until everything possible to be done had been skilfully and promptly done – the poor belated wanderer in a strange land movingly besought that favour of him – and lingered by the bed to which he was in due time removed, until he had fallen into a doze. Even then he wrote a few words for him on his card, with a promise to return to-morrow, and left it to be given to him when he should awake.

All these proceedings occupied so long that it struck eleven o'clock at night as he came out at the Hospital Gate. He had hired a lodging for the present in Covent Garden, and he took the nearest way to that quarter, by Snow Hill and Holborn.

Left to himself again, after the solicitude and compassion of his last adventure, he was naturally in a thoughtful mood. As naturally, he could not walk on thinking for ten minutes without recalling Flora. She necessarily recalled to him his life, with all its misdirection and little happiness.

When he got to his lodging, he sat down before the dying fire, as he had stood at the window of his old room looking out upon the blackened forest of chimneys, and turned his gaze back upon the gloomy vista by which he had come to that stage in his existence. So long, so bare, so blank. No childhood; no youth, except for one remembrance; that one remembrance proved, only that day, to be a piece of folly.

It was a misfortune to him, trifle as it might have been to another. For, while all that was hard and stern in his recollection, remained Reality on being proved – was obdurate to the sight and touch, and relaxed nothing of its old indomitable grimness – the one tender recollection of his experience would not bear the same test, and melted away. He had foreseen this, on the former night, when he had dreamed with waking eyes, but he had not felt it then; and he had now.

He was a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honourable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reserving the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity.

And this saved him still from the whimpering weakness and cruel selfishness of holding that because such a happiness or such a virtue had not come into his little path, or worked well for him, therefore it was not in the great scheme, but was reducible, when found in appearance, to the basest elements. A disappointed mind he had, but a mind too firm and healthy for such unwholesome air. Leaving himself in the dark, it could rise

into the light, seeing it shine on others and hailing it.

Therefore, he sat before his dying fire, sorrowful to think upon the way by which he had come to that night, yet not strewing poison on the way by which other men had come to it. That he should have missed so much, and at his time of life should look so far about him for any staff to bear him company upon his downward journey and cheer it, was a just regret. He looked at the fire from which the blaze departed, from which the afterglow subsided, in which the ashes turned grey, from which they dropped to dust, and thought, 'How soon I too shall pass through such changes, and be gone!'

To review his life was like descending a green tree in fruit and flower, and seeing all the branches wither and drop off, one by one, as he came down towards them.

'From the unhappy suppression of my youngest days, through the rigid and unloving home that followed them, through my departure, my long exile, my return, my mother's welcome, my intercourse with her since, down to the afternoon of this day with poor Flora,' said Arthur Clennam, 'what have I found!'

His door was softly opened, and these spoken words startled him, and came as if they were an answer:

'Little Dorrit.'

CHAPTER 14. Little Dorrit's Party

Arthur Clennam rose hastily, and saw her standing at the door. This history must sometimes see with Little Dorrit's eyes, and shall begin that course by seeing him.

Little Dorrit looked into a dim room, which seemed a spacious one to her, and grandly furnished. Courtly ideas of Covent Garden, as a place with famous coffee-houses, where gentlemen wearing gold-laced coats and swords had quarrelled and fought duels; costly ideas of Covent Garden, as a place where there were flowers in winter at guineas a-piece, pine-apples at guineas a pound, and peas at guineas a pint; picturesque ideas of Covent Garden, as a place where there was a mighty theatre, showing wonderful and beautiful sights to richly-dressed ladies and gentlemen, and which was for ever far beyond the reach of poor Fanny or poor uncle; desolate ideas of Covent Garden, as having all those arches in it, where the miserable children in rags among whom she had just now passed, like young rats, slunk and hid, fed on offal, huddled together for warmth, and were hunted about (look to the rats young and old, all ye Barnacles, for before God they are eating away our foundations, and will bring the roofs on our heads!); teeming ideas of Covent Garden, as a place of past and present mystery, romance, abundance, want, beauty, ugliness, fair country gardens, and foul street gutters; all confused together, – made the room dimmer than it was in Little

Dorrit's eyes, as they timidly saw it from the door.

At first in the chair before the gone-out fire, and then turned round wondering to see her, was the gentleman whom she sought. The brown, grave gentleman, who smiled so pleasantly, who was so frank and considerate in his manner, and yet in whose earnestness there was something that reminded her of his mother, with the great difference that she was earnest in asperity and he in gentleness. Now he regarded her with that attentive and inquiring look before which Little Dorrit's eyes had always fallen, and before which they fell still.

'My poor child! Here at midnight?'

'I said Little Dorrit, sir, on purpose to prepare you. I knew you must be very much surprised.'

'Are you alone?'

'No sir, I have got Maggy with me.'

Considering her entrance sufficiently prepared for by this mention of her name, Maggy appeared from the landing outside, on the broad grin. She instantly suppressed that manifestation, however, and became fixedly solemn.

'And I have no fire,' said Clennam. 'And you are – ' He was going to say so lightly clad, but stopped himself in what would have been a reference to her poverty, saying instead, 'And it is so cold.'

Putting the chair from which he had risen nearer to the grate, he made her sit down in it; and hurriedly bringing wood and coal, heaped them together and got a blaze.

‘Your foot is like marble, my child;’ he had happened to touch it, while stooping on one knee at his work of kindling the fire; ‘put it nearer the warmth.’ Little Dorrit thanked him hastily. It was quite warm, it was very warm! It smote upon his heart to feel that she hid her thin, worn shoe.

Little Dorrit was not ashamed of her poor shoes. He knew her story, and it was not that. Little Dorrit had a misgiving that he might blame her father, if he saw them; that he might think, ‘why did he dine to-day, and leave this little creature to the mercy of the cold stones!’ She had no belief that it would have been a just reflection; she simply knew, by experience, that such delusions did sometimes present themselves to people. It was a part of her father’s misfortunes that they did.

‘Before I say anything else,’ Little Dorrit began, sitting before the pale fire, and raising her eyes again to the face which in its harmonious look of interest, and pity, and protection, she felt to be a mystery far above her in degree, and almost removed beyond her guessing at; ‘may I tell you something, sir?’

‘Yes, my child.’

A slight shade of distress fell upon her, at his so often calling her a child. She was surprised that he should see it, or think of such a slight thing; but he said directly:

‘I wanted a tender word, and could think of no other. As you just now gave yourself the name they give you at my mother’s, and as that is the name by which I always think of you, let me call you Little Dorrit.’

‘Thank you, sir, I should like it better than any name.’

‘Little Dorrit.’

‘Little mother,’ Maggy (who had been falling asleep) put in, as a correction.

‘It’s all the same, Maggy,’ returned Little Dorrit, ‘all the same.’

‘Is it all the same, mother?’

‘Just the same.’

Maggy laughed, and immediately snored. In Little Dorrit’s eyes and ears, the uncouth figure and the uncouth sound were as pleasant as could be. There was a glow of pride in her big child, overspreading her face, when it again met the eyes of the grave brown gentleman. She wondered what he was thinking of, as he looked at Maggy and her. She thought what a good father he would be. How, with some such look, he would counsel and cherish his daughter.

‘What I was going to tell you, sir,’ said Little Dorrit, ‘is, that my brother is at large.’

Arthur was rejoiced to hear it, and hoped he would do well.

‘And what I was going to tell you, sir,’ said Little Dorrit, trembling in all her little figure and in her voice, ‘is, that I am not to know whose generosity released him – am never to ask, and am never to be told, and am never to thank that gentleman with all my grateful heart!’

He would probably need no thanks, Clennam said. Very likely he would be thankful himself (and with reason), that he had had the means and chance of doing a little service to her, who well

deserved a great one.

'And what I was going to say, sir, is,' said Little Dorrit, trembling more and more, 'that if I knew him, and I might, I would tell him that he can never, never know how I feel his goodness, and how my good father would feel it. And what I was going to say, sir, is, that if I knew him, and I might – but I don't know him and I must not – I know that! – I would tell him that I shall never any more lie down to sleep without having prayed to Heaven to bless him and reward him. And if I knew him, and I might, I would go down on my knees to him, and take his hand and kiss it and ask him not to draw it away, but to leave it – O to leave it for a moment – and let my thankful tears fall on it; for I have no other thanks to give him!'

Little Dorrit had put his hand to her lips, and would have kneeled to him, but he gently prevented her, and replaced her in her chair. Her eyes, and the tones of her voice, had thanked him far better than she thought. He was not able to say, quite as composedly as usual, 'There, Little Dorrit, there, there, there! We will suppose that you did know this person, and that you might do all this, and that it was all done. And now tell me, Who am quite another person – who am nothing more than the friend who begged you to trust him – why you are out at midnight, and what it is that brings you so far through the streets at this late hour, my slight, delicate,' child was on his lips again, 'Little Dorrit!'

'Maggy and I have been to-night,' she answered, subduing

herself with the quiet effort that had long been natural to her, 'to the theatre where my sister is engaged.'

'And oh ain't it a Ev'nly place,' suddenly interrupted Maggy, who seemed to have the power of going to sleep and waking up whenever she chose. 'Almost as good as a hospital. Only there ain't no Chicking in it.'

Here she shook herself, and fell asleep again.

'We went there,' said Little Dorrit, glancing at her charge, 'because I like sometimes to know, of my own knowledge, that my sister is doing well; and like to see her there, with my own eyes, when neither she nor Uncle is aware. It is very seldom indeed that I can do that, because when I am not out at work, I am with my father, and even when I am out at work, I hurry home to him. But I pretend to-night that I am at a party.'

As she made the confession, timidly hesitating, she raised her eyes to the face, and read its expression so plainly that she answered it.

'Oh no, certainly! I never was at a party in my life.'

She paused a little under his attentive look, and then said, 'I hope there is no harm in it. I could never have been of any use, if I had not pretended a little.'

She feared that he was blaming her in his mind for so devising to contrive for them, think for them, and watch over them, without their knowledge or gratitude; perhaps even with their reproaches for supposed neglect. But what was really in his mind, was the weak figure with its strong purpose, the thin worn

shoes, the insufficient dress, and the pretence of recreation and enjoyment. He asked where the suppositious party was? At a place where she worked, answered Little Dorrit, blushing. She had said very little about it; only a few words to make her father easy. Her father did not believe it to be a grand party – indeed he might suppose that. And she glanced for an instant at the shawl she wore.

'It is the first night,' said Little Dorrit, 'that I have ever been away from home. And London looks so large, so barren, and so wild.' In Little Dorrit's eyes, its vastness under the black sky was awful; a tremor passed over her as she said the words.

'But this is not,' she added, with the quiet effort again, 'what I have come to trouble you with, sir. My sister's having found a friend, a lady she has told me of and made me rather anxious about, was the first cause of my coming away from home. And being away, and coming (on purpose) round by where you lived and seeing a light in the window – '

Not for the first time. No, not for the first time. In Little Dorrit's eyes, the outside of that window had been a distant star on other nights than this. She had toiled out of her way, tired and troubled, to look up at it, and wonder about the grave, brown gentleman from so far off, who had spoken to her as a friend and protector.

'There were three things,' said Little Dorrit, 'that I thought I would like to say, if you were alone and I might come up-stairs. First, what I have tried to say, but never can – never shall – '

‘Hush, hush! That is done with, and disposed of. Let us pass to the second,’ said Clennam, smiling her agitation away, making the blaze shine upon her, and putting wine and cake and fruit towards her on the table.

‘I think,’ said Little Dorrit – ‘this is the second thing, sir – I think Mrs Clennam must have found out my secret, and must know where I come from and where I go to. Where I live, I mean.’

‘Indeed!’ returned Clennam quickly. He asked her, after short consideration, why she supposed so.

‘I think,’ replied Little Dorrit, ‘that Mr Flintwinch must have watched me.’

And why, Clennam asked, as he turned his eyes upon the fire, bent his brows, and considered again; why did she suppose that?

‘I have met him twice. Both times near home. Both times at night, when I was going back. Both times I thought (though that may easily be my mistake), that he hardly looked as if he had met me by accident.’

‘Did he say anything?’

‘No; he only nodded and put his head on one side.’

‘The devil take his head!’ mused Clennam, still looking at the fire; ‘it’s always on one side.’

He roused himself to persuade her to put some wine to her lips, and to touch something to eat – it was very difficult, she was so timid and shy – and then said, musing again:

‘Is my mother at all changed to you?’

‘Oh, not at all. She is just the same. I wondered whether I

had better tell her my history. I wondered whether I might – I mean, whether you would like me to tell her. I wondered,' said Little Dorrit, looking at him in a suppliant way, and gradually withdrawing her eyes as he looked at her, 'whether you would advise me what I ought to do.'

'Little Dorrit,' said Clennam; and the phrase had already begun, between these two, to stand for a hundred gentle phrases, according to the varying tone and connection in which it was used; 'do nothing. I will have some talk with my old friend, Mrs Affery. Do nothing, Little Dorrit – except refresh yourself with such means as there are here. I entreat you to do that.'

'Thank you, I am not hungry. Nor,' said Little Dorrit, as he softly put her glass towards her, 'nor thirsty. – I think Maggy might like something, perhaps.'

'We will make her find pockets presently for all there is here,' said Clennam: 'but before we awake her, there was a third thing to say.'

'Yes. You will not be offended, sir?'

'I promise that, unreservedly.'

'It will sound strange. I hardly know how to say it. Don't think it unreasonable or ungrateful in me,' said Little Dorrit, with returning and increasing agitation.

'No, no, no. I am sure it will be natural and right. I am not afraid that I shall put a wrong construction on it, whatever it is.'

'Thank you. You are coming back to see my father again?'

'Yes.'

‘You have been so good and thoughtful as to write him a note, saying that you are coming to-morrow?’

‘Oh, that was nothing! Yes.’

‘Can you guess,’ said Little Dorrit, folding her small hands tight in one another, and looking at him with all the earnestness of her soul looking steadily out of her eyes, ‘what I am going to ask you not to do?’

‘I think I can. But I may be wrong.’

‘No, you are not wrong,’ said Little Dorrit, shaking her head. ‘If we should want it so very, very badly that we cannot do without it, let me ask you for it.’

‘I Will, – I Will.’

‘Don’t encourage him to ask. Don’t understand him if he does ask. Don’t give it to him. Save him and spare him that, and you will be able to think better of him!’

Clennam said – not very plainly, seeing those tears glistening in her anxious eyes – that her wish should be sacred with him.

‘You don’t know what he is,’ she said; ‘you don’t know what he really is. How can you, seeing him there all at once, dear love, and not gradually, as I have done! You have been so good to us, so delicately and truly good, that I want him to be better in your eyes than in anybody’s. And I cannot bear to think,’ cried Little Dorrit, covering her tears with her hands, ‘I cannot bear to think that you of all the world should see him in his only moments of degradation.’

‘Pray,’ said Clennam, ‘do not be so distressed. Pray, pray,

Little Dorrit! This is quite understood now.'

'Thank you, sir. Thank you! I have tried very much to keep myself from saying this; I have thought about it, days and nights; but when I knew for certain you were coming again, I made up my mind to speak to you. Not because I am ashamed of him,' she dried her tears quickly, 'but because I know him better than any one does, and love him, and am proud of him.'

Relieved of this weight, Little Dorrit was nervously anxious to be gone. Maggy being broad awake, and in the act of distantly gloating over the fruit and cakes with chuckles of anticipation, Clennam made the best diversion in his power by pouring her out a glass of wine, which she drank in a series of loud smacks; putting her hand upon her windpipe after every one, and saying, breathless, with her eyes in a prominent state, 'Oh, ain't it d'licious! Ain't it hospitally!' When she had finished the wine and these encomiums, he charged her to load her basket (she was never without her basket) with every eatable thing upon the table, and to take especial care to leave no scrap behind. Maggy's pleasure in doing this and her little mother's pleasure in seeing Maggy pleased, was as good a turn as circumstances could have given to the late conversation.

'But the gates will have been locked long ago,' said Clennam, suddenly remembering it. 'Where are you going?'

'I am going to Maggy's lodging,' answered Little Dorrit. 'I shall be quite safe, quite well taken care of.'

'I must accompany you there,' said Clennam, 'I cannot let you

go alone.'

'Yes, pray leave us to go there by ourselves. Pray do!' begged Little Dorrit.

She was so earnest in the petition, that Clennam felt a delicacy in obtruding himself upon her: the rather, because he could well understand that Maggy's lodging was of the obscurest sort. 'Come, Maggy,' said Little Dorrit cheerily, 'we shall do very well; we know the way by this time, Maggy?'

'Yes, yes, little mother; we know the way,' chuckled Maggy. And away they went. Little Dorrit turned at the door to say, 'God bless you!' She said it very softly, but perhaps she may have been as audible above – who knows! – as a whole cathedral choir.

Arthur Clennam suffered them to pass the corner of the street before he followed at a distance; not with any idea of encroaching a second time on Little Dorrit's privacy, but to satisfy his mind by seeing her secure in the neighbourhood to which she was accustomed. So diminutive she looked, so fragile and defenceless against the bleak damp weather, flitting along in the shuffling shadow of her charge, that he felt, in his compassion, and in his habit of considering her a child apart from the rest of the rough world, as if he would have been glad to take her up in his arms and carry her to her journey's end.

In course of time she came into the leading thoroughfare where the Marshalsea was, and then he saw them slacken their pace, and soon turn down a by-street. He stopped, felt that he had no right to go further, and slowly left them. He had no suspicion

that they ran any risk of being houseless until morning; had no idea of the truth until long, long afterwards.

But, said Little Dorrit, when they stopped at a poor dwelling all in darkness, and heard no sound on listening at the door, 'Now, this is a good lodging for you, Maggy, and we must not give offence. Consequently, we will only knock twice, and not very loud; and if we cannot wake them so, we must walk about till day.'

Once, Little Dorrit knocked with a careful hand, and listened. Twice, Little Dorrit knocked with a careful hand, and listened. All was close and still. 'Maggy, we must do the best we can, my dear. We must be patient, and wait for day.'

It was a chill dark night, with a damp wind blowing, when they came out into the leading street again, and heard the clocks strike half-past one. 'In only five hours and a half,' said Little Dorrit, 'we shall be able to go home.' To speak of home, and to go and look at it, it being so near, was a natural sequence. They went to the closed gate, and peeped through into the court-yard. 'I hope he is sound asleep,' said Little Dorrit, kissing one of the bars, 'and does not miss me.'

The gate was so familiar, and so like a companion, that they put down Maggy's basket in a corner to serve for a seat, and keeping close together, rested there for some time. While the street was empty and silent, Little Dorrit was not afraid; but when she heard a footstep at a distance, or saw a moving shadow among the street lamps, she was startled, and whispered, 'Maggy, I see

some one. Come away!' Maggy would then wake up more or less fretfully, and they would wander about a little, and come back again.

As long as eating was a novelty and an amusement, Maggy kept up pretty well. But that period going by, she became querulous about the cold, and shivered and whimpered. 'It will soon be over, dear,' said Little Dorrit patiently. 'Oh it's all very fine for you, little mother,' returned Maggy, 'but I'm a poor thing, only ten years old.' At last, in the dead of the night, when the street was very still indeed, Little Dorrit laid the heavy head upon her bosom, and soothed her to sleep. And thus she sat at the gate, as it were alone; looking up at the stars, and seeing the clouds pass over them in their wild flight – which was the dance at Little Dorrit's party.

'If it really was a party!' she thought once, as she sat there. 'If it was light and warm and beautiful, and it was our house, and my poor dear was its master, and had never been inside these walls. And if Mr Clennam was one of our visitors, and we were dancing to delightful music, and were all as gay and light-hearted as ever we could be! I wonder – ' Such a vista of wonder opened out before her, that she sat looking up at the stars, quite lost, until Maggy was querulous again, and wanted to get up and walk.

Three o'clock, and half-past three, and they had passed over London Bridge. They had heard the rush of the tide against obstacles; and looked down, awed, through the dark vapour on the river; had seen little spots of lighted water where the bridge

lamps were reflected, shining like demon eyes, with a terrible fascination in them for guilt and misery. They had shrunk past homeless people, lying coiled up in nooks. They had run from drunkards. They had started from slinking men, whistling and signing to one another at bye corners, or running away at full speed. Though everywhere the leader and the guide, Little Dorrit, happy for once in her youthful appearance, feigned to cling to and rely upon Maggy. And more than once some voice, from among a knot of brawling or prowling figures in their path, had called out to the rest to 'let the woman and the child go by!'

So, the woman and the child had gone by, and gone on, and five had sounded from the steeples. They were walking slowly towards the east, already looking for the first pale streak of day, when a woman came after them.

'What are you doing with the child?' she said to Maggy.

She was young – far too young to be there, Heaven knows! – and neither ugly nor wicked-looking. She spoke coarsely, but with no naturally coarse voice; there was even something musical in its sound.

'What are you doing with yourself?' retorted Maggy, for want of a better answer.

'Can't you see, without my telling you?'

'I don't know as I can,' said Maggy.

'Killing myself! Now I have answered you, answer me. What are you doing with the child?'

The supposed child kept her head drooped down, and kept her

form close at Maggy's side.

'Poor thing!' said the woman. 'Have you no feeling, that you keep her out in the cruel streets at such a time as this? Have you no eyes, that you don't see how delicate and slender she is? Have you no sense (you don't look as if you had much) that you don't take more pity on this cold and trembling little hand?'

She had stepped across to that side, and held the hand between her own two, chafing it. 'Kiss a poor lost creature, dear,' she said, bending her face, 'and tell me where's she taking you.'

Little Dorrit turned towards her.

'Why, my God!' she said, recoiling, 'you're a woman!'

'Don't mind that!' said Little Dorrit, clasping one of her hands that had suddenly released hers. 'I am not afraid of you.'

'Then you had better be,' she answered. 'Have you no mother?'

'No.'

'No father?'

'Yes, a very dear one.'

'Go home to him, and be afraid of me. Let me go. Good night!'

'I must thank you first; let me speak to you as if I really were a child.'

'You can't do it,' said the woman. 'You are kind and innocent; but you can't look at me out of a child's eyes. I never should have touched you, but I thought that you were a child.' And with a strange, wild cry, she went away.

No day yet in the sky, but there was day in the resounding stones of the streets; in the waggons, carts, and coaches; in the

workers going to various occupations; in the opening of early shops; in the traffic at markets; in the stir of the riverside. There was coming day in the flaring lights, with a feebler colour in them than they would have had at another time; coming day in the increased sharpness of the air, and the ghastly dying of the night.

They went back again to the gate, intending to wait there now until it should be opened; but the air was so raw and cold that Little Dorrit, leading Maggy about in her sleep, kept in motion. Going round by the Church, she saw lights there, and the door open; and went up the steps and looked in.

'Who's that?' cried a stout old man, who was putting on a nightcap as if he were going to bed in a vault.

'It's no one particular, sir,' said Little Dorrit.

'Stop!' cried the man. 'Let's have a look at you!'

This caused her to turn back again in the act of going out, and to present herself and her charge before him.

'I thought so!' said he. 'I know *you*.'

'We have often seen each other,' said Little Dorrit, recognising the sexton, or the beadle, or the verger, or whatever he was, 'when I have been at church here.'

'More than that, we've got your birth in our Register, you know; you're one of our curiosities.'

'Indeed!' said Little Dorrit.

'To be sure. As the child of the – by-the-bye, how did you get out so early?'

'We were shut out last night, and are waiting to get in.'

‘You don’t mean it? And there’s another hour good yet! Come into the vestry. You’ll find a fire in the vestry, on account of the painters. I’m waiting for the painters, or I shouldn’t be here, you may depend upon it. One of our curiosities mustn’t be cold when we have it in our power to warm her up comfortable. Come along.’

He was a very good old fellow, in his familiar way; and having stirred the vestry fire, he looked round the shelves of registers for a particular volume. ‘Here you are, you see,’ he said, taking it down and turning the leaves. ‘Here you’ll find yourself, as large as life. Amy, daughter of William and Fanny Dorrit. Born, Marshalsea Prison, Parish of St George. And we tell people that you have lived there, without so much as a day’s or a night’s absence, ever since. Is it true?’

‘Quite true, till last night.’

‘Lord!’ But his surveying her with an admiring gaze suggested Something else to him, to wit: ‘I am sorry to see, though, that you are faint and tired. Stay a bit. I’ll get some cushions out of the church, and you and your friend shall lie down before the fire. Don’t be afraid of not going in to join your father when the gate opens. *I’ll* call you.’

He soon brought in the cushions, and strewed them on the ground.

‘There you are, you see. Again as large as life. Oh, never mind thanking. I’ve daughters of my own. And though they weren’t born in the Marshalsea Prison, they might have been, if I had

been, in my ways of carrying on, of your father's breed. Stop a bit. I must put something under the cushion for your head. Here's a burial volume, just the thing! We have got Mrs Bangham in this book. But what makes these books interesting to most people is – not who's in 'em, but who isn't – who's coming, you know, and when. That's the interesting question.'

Commendingly looking back at the pillow he had improvised, he left them to their hour's repose. Maggy was snoring already, and Little Dorrit was soon fast asleep with her head resting on that sealed book of Fate, untroubled by its mysterious blank leaves.

This was Little Dorrit's party. The shame, desertion, wretchedness, and exposure of the great capital; the wet, the cold, the slow hours, and the swift clouds of the dismal night. This was the party from which Little Dorrit went home, jaded, in the first grey mist of a rainy morning.

CHAPTER 15. Mrs Flintwinch has another Dream

The debilitated old house in the city, wrapped in its mantle of soot, and leaning heavily on the crutches that had partaken of its decay and worn out with it, never knew a healthy or a cheerful interval, let what would betide. If the sun ever touched it, it was but with a ray, and that was gone in half an hour; if the moonlight ever fell upon it, it was only to put a few patches on its doleful cloak, and make it look more wretched. The stars, to be sure, coldly watched it when the nights and the smoke were clear enough; and all bad weather stood by it with a rare fidelity. You should alike find rain, hail, frost, and thaw lingering in that dismal enclosure when they had vanished from other places; and as to snow, you should see it there for weeks, long after it had changed from yellow to black, slowly weeping away its grimy life. The place had no other adherents. As to street noises, the rumbling of wheels in the lane merely rushed in at the gateway in going past, and rushed out again: making the listening Mistress Affery feel as if she were deaf, and recovered the sense of hearing by instantaneous flashes. So with whistling, singing, talking, laughing, and all pleasant human sounds. They leaped the gap in a moment, and went upon their way.

The varying light of fire and candle in Mrs Clennam's room made the greatest change that ever broke the dead monotony of

the spot. In her two long narrow windows, the fire shone sullenly all day, and sullenly all night. On rare occasions it flashed up passionately, as she did; but for the most part it was suppressed, like her, and preyed upon itself evenly and slowly. During many hours of the short winter days, however, when it was dusk there early in the afternoon, changing distortions of herself in her wheeled chair, of Mr Flintwinch with his wry neck, of Mistress Affery coming and going, would be thrown upon the house wall that was over the gateway, and would hover there like shadows from a great magic lantern. As the room-ridden invalid settled for the night, these would gradually disappear: Mistress Affery's magnified shadow always flitting about, last, until it finally glided away into the air, as though she were off upon a witch excursion. Then the solitary light would burn unchangingly, until it burned pale before the dawn, and at last died under the breath of Mrs Affery, as her shadow descended on it from the witch-region of sleep.

Strange, if the little sick-room fire were in effect a beacon fire, summoning some one, and that the most unlikely some one in the world, to the spot that *must* be come to. Strange, if the little sick-room light were in effect a watch-light, burning in that place every night until an appointed event should be watched out! Which of the vast multitude of travellers, under the sun and the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another; which of

the host may, with no suspicion of the journey's end, be travelling surely hither?

Time shall show us. The post of honour and the post of shame, the general's station and the drummer's, a peer's statue in Westminster Abbey and a seaman's hammock in the bosom of the deep, the mitre and the workhouse, the woolsack and the gallows, the throne and the guillotine – the travellers to all are on the great high road, but it has wonderful divergencies, and only Time shall show us whither each traveller is bound.

On a wintry afternoon at twilight, Mrs Flintwinch, having been heavy all day, dreamed this dream:

She thought she was in the kitchen getting the kettle ready for tea, and was warming herself with her feet upon the fender and the skirt of her gown tucked up, before the collapsed fire in the middle of the grate, bordered on either hand by a deep cold black ravine. She thought that as she sat thus, musing upon the question whether life was not for some people a rather dull invention, she was frightened by a sudden noise behind her. She thought that she had been similarly frightened once last week, and that the noise was of a mysterious kind – a sound of rustling and of three or four quick beats like a rapid step; while a shock or tremble was communicated to her heart, as if the step had shaken the floor, or even as if she had been touched by some awful hand. She thought that this revived within her certain old fears of hers that the house was haunted; and that she flew up the kitchen stairs without knowing how she got up, to be nearer company.

Mistress Affery thought that on reaching the hall, she saw the door of her liege lord's office standing open, and the room empty. That she went to the ripped-up window in the little room by the street door to connect her palpitating heart, through the glass, with living things beyond and outside the haunted house. That she then saw, on the wall over the gateway, the shadows of the two clever ones in conversation above. That she then went upstairs with her shoes in her hand, partly to be near the clever ones as a match for most ghosts, and partly to hear what they were talking about.

'None of your nonsense with me,' said Mr Flintwinch. 'I won't take it from you.'

Mrs Flintwinch dreamed that she stood behind the door, which was just ajar, and most distinctly heard her husband say these bold words.

'Flintwinch,' returned Mrs Clennam, in her usual strong low voice, 'there is a demon of anger in you. Guard against it.'

'I don't care whether there's one or a dozen,' said Mr Flintwinch, forcibly suggesting in his tone that the higher number was nearer the mark. 'If there was fifty, they should all say, None of your nonsense with me, I won't take it from you – I'd make 'em say it, whether they liked it or not.'

'What have I done, you wrathful man?' her strong voice asked.

'Done?' said Mr Flintwinch. 'Dropped down upon me.'

'If you mean, remonstrated with you – '

'Don't put words into my mouth that I don't mean,' said

Jeremiah, sticking to his figurative expression with tenacious and impenetrable obstinacy: 'I mean dropped down upon me.'

'I remonstrated with you,' she began again, 'because – '

'I won't have it!' cried Jeremiah. 'You dropped down upon me.'

'I dropped down upon you, then, you ill-conditioned man,' (Jeremiah chuckled at having forced her to adopt his phrase,) 'for having been needlessly significant to Arthur that morning. I have a right to complain of it as almost a breach of confidence. You did not mean it – '

'I won't have it!' interposed the contradictory Jeremiah, flinging back the concession. 'I did mean it.'

'I suppose I must leave you to speak in soliloquy if you choose,' she replied, after a pause that seemed an angry one. 'It is useless my addressing myself to a rash and headstrong old man who has a set purpose not to hear me.'

'Now, I won't take that from you either,' said Jeremiah. 'I have no such purpose. I have told you I did mean it. Do you wish to know why I meant it, you rash and headstrong old woman?'

'After all, you only restore me my own words,' she said, struggling with her indignation. 'Yes.'

'This is why, then. Because you hadn't cleared his father to him, and you ought to have done it. Because, before you went into any tantrum about yourself, who are – '

'Hold there, Flintwinch!' she cried out in a changed voice: 'you may go a word too far.'

The old man seemed to think so. There was another pause,

and he had altered his position in the room, when he spoke again more mildly:

'I was going to tell you why it was. Because, before you took your own part, I thought you ought to have taken the part of Arthur's father. Arthur's father! I had no particular love for Arthur's father. I served Arthur's father's uncle, in this house, when Arthur's father was not much above me – was poorer as far as his pocket went – and when his uncle might as soon have left me his heir as have left him. He starved in the parlour, and I starved in the kitchen; that was the principal difference in our positions; there was not much more than a flight of breakneck stairs between us. I never took to him in those times; I don't know that I ever took to him greatly at any time. He was an undecided, irresolute chap, who had everything but his orphan life scared out of him when he was young. And when he brought you home here, the wife his uncle had named for him, I didn't need to look at you twice (you were a good-looking woman at that time) to know who'd be master. You have stood of your own strength ever since. Stand of your own strength now. Don't lean against the dead.'

'I do *not*– as you call it – lean against the dead.'

'But you had a mind to do it, if I had submitted,' growled Jeremiah, 'and that's why you drop down upon me. You can't forget that I didn't submit. I suppose you are astonished that I should consider it worth my while to have justice done to Arthur's father? Hey? It doesn't matter whether you answer or

not, because I know you are, and you know you are. Come, then, I'll tell you how it is. I may be a bit of an oddity in point of temper, but this is my temper – I can't let anybody have entirely their own way. You are a determined woman, and a clever woman; and when you see your purpose before you, nothing will turn you from it. Who knows that better than I do?'

'Nothing will turn me from it, Flintwinch, when I have justified it to myself. Add that.'

'Justified it to yourself? I said you were the most determined woman on the face of the earth (or I meant to say so), and if you are determined to justify any object you entertain, of course you'll do it.'

'Man! I justify myself by the authority of these Books,' she cried, with stern emphasis, and appearing from the sound that followed to strike the dead-weight of her arm upon the table.

'Never mind that,' returned Jeremiah calmly, 'we won't enter into that question at present. However that may be, you carry out your purposes, and you make everything go down before them. Now, I won't go down before them. I have been faithful to you, and useful to you, and I am attached to you. But I can't consent, and I won't consent, and I never did consent, and I never will consent to be lost in you. Swallow up everybody else, and welcome. The peculiarity of my temper is, ma'am, that I won't be swallowed up alive.'

Perhaps this had originally been the mainspring of the understanding between them. Descrying thus much of force of

character in Mr Flintwinch, perhaps Mrs Clennam had deemed alliance with him worth her while.

'Enough and more than enough of the subject,' said she gloomily.

'Unless you drop down upon me again,' returned the persistent Flintwinch, 'and then you must expect to hear of it again.'

Mistress Affery dreamed that the figure of her lord here began walking up and down the room, as if to cool his spleen, and that she ran away; but that, as he did not issue forth when she had stood listening and trembling in the shadowy hall a little time, she crept up-stairs again, impelled as before by ghosts and curiosity, and once more cowered outside the door.

'Please to light the candle, Flintwinch,' Mrs Clennam was saying, apparently wishing to draw him back into their usual tone. 'It is nearly time for tea. Little Dorrit is coming, and will find me in the dark.'

Mr Flintwinch lighted the candle briskly, and said as he put it down upon the table:

'What are you going to do with Little Dorrit? Is she to come to work here for ever? To come to tea here for ever? To come backwards and forwards here, in the same way, for ever?'

'How can you talk about "for ever" to a maimed creature like me? Are we not all cut down like the grass of the field, and was not I shorn by the scythe many years ago: since when I have been lying here, waiting to be gathered into the barn?'

'Ay, ay! But since you have been lying here – not near dead –

nothing like it – numbers of children and young people, blooming women, strong men, and what not, have been cut down and carried; and still here are you, you see, not much changed after all. Your time and mine may be a long one yet. When I say for ever, I mean (though I am not poetical) through all our time.' Mr Flintwinch gave this explanation with great calmness, and calmly waited for an answer.

'So long as Little Dorrit is quiet and industrious, and stands in need of the slight help I can give her, and deserves it; so long, I suppose, unless she withdraws of her own act, she will continue to come here, I being spared.'

'Nothing more than that?' said Flintwinch, stroking his mouth and chin.

'What should there be more than that! What could there be more than that!' she ejaculated in her sternly wondering way.

Mrs Flintwinch dreamed, that, for the space of a minute or two, they remained looking at each other with the candle between them, and that she somehow derived an impression that they looked at each other fixedly.

'Do you happen to know, Mrs Clennam,' Affery's liege lord then demanded in a much lower voice, and with an amount of expression that seemed quite out of proportion to the simple purpose of his words, 'where she lives?'

'No.'

'Would you – now, would you like to know?' said Jeremiah with a pounce as if he had sprung upon her.

‘If I cared to know, I should know already. Could I not have asked her any day?’

‘Then you don’t care to know?’

‘I do not.’

Mr Flintwinch, having expelled a long significant breath said, with his former emphasis, ‘For I have accidentally – mind! – found out.’

‘Wherever she lives,’ said Mrs Clennam, speaking in one unmodulated hard voice, and separating her words as distinctly as if she were reading them off from separate bits of metal that she took up one by one, ‘she has made a secret of it, and she shall always keep her secret from me.’

‘After all, perhaps you would rather not have known the fact, any how?’ said Jeremiah; and he said it with a twist, as if his words had come out of him in his own wry shape.

‘Flintwinch,’ said his mistress and partner, flashing into a sudden energy that made Affery start, ‘why do you goad me? Look round this room. If it is any compensation for my long confinement within these narrow limits – not that I complain of being afflicted; you know I never complain of that – if it is any compensation to me for long confinement to this room, that while I am shut up from all pleasant change I am also shut up from the knowledge of some things that I may prefer to avoid knowing, why should you, of all men, grudge me that belief?’

‘I don’t grudge it to you,’ returned Jeremiah.

‘Then say no more. Say no more. Let Little Dorrit keep her

secret from me, and do you keep it from me also. Let her come and go, unobserved and unquestioned. Let me suffer, and let me have what alleviation belongs to my condition. Is it so much, that you torment me like an evil spirit?'

'I asked you a question. That's all.'

'I have answered it. So, say no more. Say no more.' Here the sound of the wheeled chair was heard upon the floor, and Affery's bell rang with a hasty jerk.

More afraid of her husband at the moment than of the mysterious sound in the kitchen, Affery crept away as lightly and as quickly as she could, descended the kitchen stairs almost as rapidly as she had ascended them, resumed her seat before the fire, tucked up her skirt again, and finally threw her apron over her head. Then the bell rang once more, and then once more, and then kept on ringing; in despite of which importunate summons, Affery still sat behind her apron, recovering her breath.

At last Mr Flintwinch came shuffling down the staircase into the hall, muttering and calling 'Affery woman!' all the way. Affery still remaining behind her apron, he came stumbling down the kitchen stairs, candle in hand, sidled up to her, twitched her apron off, and roused her.

'Oh Jeremiah!' cried Affery, waking. 'What a start you gave me!'

'What have you been doing, woman?' inquired Jeremiah. 'You've been rung for fifty times.'

'Oh Jeremiah,' said Mistress Affery, 'I have been a-dreaming!'

Reminded of her former achievement in that way, Mr Flintwinch held the candle to her head, as if he had some idea of lighting her up for the illumination of the kitchen.

'Don't you know it's her tea-time?' he demanded with a vicious grin, and giving one of the legs of Mistress Affery's chair a kick.

'Jeremiah? Tea-time? I don't know what's come to me. But I got such a dreadful turn, Jeremiah, before I went – off a-dreaming, that I think it must be that.'

'Yoogh! Sleepy-Head!' said Mr Flintwinch, 'what are you talking about?'

'Such a strange noise, Jeremiah, and such a curious movement. In the kitchen here – just here.'

Jeremiah held up his light and looked at the blackened ceiling, held down his light and looked at the damp stone floor, turned round with his light and looked about at the spotted and blotched walls.

'Rats, cats, water, drains,' said Jeremiah.

Mistress Affery negatived each with a shake of her head. 'No, Jeremiah; I have felt it before. I have felt it up-stairs, and once on the staircase as I was going from her room to ours in the night – a rustle and a sort of trembling touch behind me.'

'Affery, my woman,' said Mr Flintwinch grimly, after advancing his nose to that lady's lips as a test for the detection of spirituous liquors, 'if you don't get tea pretty quick, old woman, you'll become sensible of a rustle and a touch that'll send you flying to the other end of the kitchen.'

This prediction stimulated Mrs Flintwinch to bestir herself, and to hasten up-stairs to Mrs Clennam's chamber. But, for all that, she now began to entertain a settled conviction that there was something wrong in the gloomy house. Henceforth, she was never at peace in it after daylight departed; and never went up or down stairs in the dark without having her apron over her head, lest she should see something.

What with these ghostly apprehensions and her singular dreams, Mrs Flintwinch fell that evening into a haunted state of mind, from which it may be long before this present narrative descries any trace of her recovery. In the vagueness and indistinctness of all her new experiences and perceptions, as everything about her was mysterious to herself she began to be mysterious to others: and became as difficult to be made out to anybody's satisfaction as she found the house and everything in it difficult to make out to her own.

She had not yet finished preparing Mrs Clennam's tea, when the soft knock came to the door which always announced Little Dorrit. Mistress Affery looked on at Little Dorrit taking off her homely bonnet in the hall, and at Mr Flintwinch scraping his jaws and contemplating her in silence, as expecting some wonderful consequence to ensue which would frighten her out of her five wits or blow them all three to pieces.

After tea there came another knock at the door, announcing Arthur. Mistress Affery went down to let him in, and he said on entering, 'Affery, I am glad it's you. I want to ask you a question.'

Affery immediately replied, 'For goodness sake don't ask me nothing, Arthur! I am frightened out of one half of my life, and dreamed out of the other. Don't ask me nothing! I don't know which is which, or what is what!' – and immediately started away from him, and came near him no more.

Mistress Affery having no taste for reading, and no sufficient light for needlework in the subdued room, supposing her to have the inclination, now sat every night in the dimness from which she had momentarily emerged on the evening of Arthur Clennam's return, occupied with crowds of wild speculations and suspicions respecting her mistress and her husband and the noises in the house. When the ferocious devotional exercises were engaged in, these speculations would distract Mistress Affery's eyes towards the door, as if she expected some dark form to appear at those propitious moments, and make the party one too many.

Otherwise, Affery never said or did anything to attract the attention of the two clever ones towards her in any marked degree, except on certain occasions, generally at about the quiet hour towards bed-time, when she would suddenly dart out of her dim corner, and whisper with a face of terror to Mr Flintwinch, reading the paper near Mrs Clennam's little table:

'There, Jeremiah! Now! What's that noise?'

Then the noise, if there were any, would have ceased, and Mr Flintwinch would snarl, turning upon her as if she had cut him down that moment against his will, 'Affery, old woman, you shall have a dose, old woman, such a dose! You have been dreaming

again!’

CHAPTER 16. Nobody's Weakness

The time being come for the renewal of his acquaintance with the Meagles family, Clennam, pursuant to contract made between himself and Mr Meagles within the precincts of Bleeding Heart Yard, turned his face on a certain Saturday towards Twickenham, where Mr Meagles had a cottage-residence of his own. The weather being fine and dry, and any English road abounding in interest for him who had been so long away, he sent his valise on by the coach, and set out to walk. A walk was in itself a new enjoyment to him, and one that had rarely diversified his life afar off.

He went by Fulham and Putney, for the pleasure of strolling over the heath. It was bright and shining there; and when he found himself so far on his road to Twickenham, he found himself a long way on his road to a number of airier and less substantial destinations. They had risen before him fast, in the healthful exercise and the pleasant road. It is not easy to walk alone in the country without musing upon something. And he had plenty of unsettled subjects to meditate upon, though he had been walking to the Land's End.

First, there was the subject seldom absent from his mind, the question, what he was to do henceforth in life; to what occupation he should devote himself, and in what direction he had best seek it. He was far from rich, and every day of indecision and inaction

made his inheritance a source of greater anxiety to him. As often as he began to consider how to increase this inheritance, or to lay it by, so often his misgiving that there was some one with an unsatisfied claim upon his justice, returned; and that alone was a subject to outlast the longest walk. Again, there was the subject of his relations with his mother, which were now upon an equable and peaceful but never confidential footing, and whom he saw several times a week. Little Dorrit was a leading and a constant subject: for the circumstances of his life, united to those of her own story, presented the little creature to him as the only person between whom and himself there were ties of innocent reliance on one hand, and affectionate protection on the other; ties of compassion, respect, unselfish interest, gratitude, and pity. Thinking of her, and of the possibility of her father's release from prison by the unbarring hand of death – the only change of circumstance he could foresee that might enable him to be such a friend to her as he wished to be, by altering her whole manner of life, smoothing her rough road, and giving her a home – he regarded her, in that perspective, as his adopted daughter, his poor child of the Marshalsea hushed to rest. If there were a last subject in his thoughts, and it lay towards Twickenham, its form was so indefinite that it was little more than the pervading atmosphere in which these other subjects floated before him.

He had crossed the heath and was leaving it behind when he gained upon a figure which had been in advance of him for some time, and which, as he gained upon it, he thought he knew. He

derived this impression from something in the turn of the head, and in the figure's action of consideration, as it went on at a sufficiently sturdy walk. But when the man – for it was a man's figure – pushed his hat up at the back of his head, and stopped to consider some object before him, he knew it to be Daniel Doyce.

'How do you do, Mr Doyce?' said Clennam, overtaking him. 'I am glad to see you again, and in a healthier place than the Circumlocution Office.'

'Ha! Mr Meagles's friend!' exclaimed that public criminal, coming out of some mental combinations he had been making, and offering his hand. 'I am glad to see you, sir. Will you excuse me if I forget your name?'

'Readily. It's not a celebrated name. It's not Barnacle.'

'No, no,' said Daniel, laughing. 'And now I know what it is. It's Clennam. How do you do, Mr Clennam?'

'I have some hope,' said Arthur, as they walked on together, 'that we may be going to the same place, Mr Doyce.'

'Meaning Twickenham?' returned Daniel. 'I am glad to hear it.'

They were soon quite intimate, and lightened the way with a variety of conversation. The ingenious culprit was a man of great modesty and good sense; and, though a plain man, had been too much accustomed to combine what was original and daring in conception with what was patient and minute in execution, to be by any means an ordinary man. It was at first difficult to lead him to speak about himself, and he put off Arthur's advances in

that direction by admitting slightly, oh yes, he had done this, and he had done that, and such a thing was of his making, and such another thing was his discovery, but it was his trade, you see, his trade; until, as he gradually became assured that his companion had a real interest in his account of himself, he frankly yielded to it. Then it appeared that he was the son of a north-country blacksmith, and had originally been apprenticed by his widowed mother to a lock-maker; that he had 'struck out a few little things' at the lock-maker's, which had led to his being released from his indentures with a present, which present had enabled him to gratify his ardent wish to bind himself to a working engineer, under whom he had laboured hard, learned hard, and lived hard, seven years. His time being out, he had 'worked in the shop' at weekly wages seven or eight years more; and had then betaken himself to the banks of the Clyde, where he had studied, and filed, and hammered, and improved his knowledge, theoretical and practical, for six or seven years more. There he had had an offer to go to Lyons, which he had accepted; and from Lyons had been engaged to go to Germany, and in Germany had had an offer to go to St Petersburg, and there had done very well indeed – never better. However, he had naturally felt a preference for his own country, and a wish to gain distinction there, and to do whatever service he could do, there rather than elsewhere. And so he had come home. And so at home he had established himself in business, and had invented and executed, and worked his way on, until, after a dozen years of constant suit and service,

he had been enrolled in the Great British Legion of Honour, the Legion of the Rebuffed of the Circumlocution Office, and had been decorated with the Great British Order of Merit, the Order of the Disorder of the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings.

'It is much to be regretted,' said Clennam, 'that you ever turned your thoughts that way, Mr Doyce.'

'True, sir, true to a certain extent. But what is a man to do? if he has the misfortune to strike out something serviceable to the nation, he must follow where it leads him.'

'Hadn't he better let it go?' said Clennam.

'He can't do it,' said Doyce, shaking his head with a thoughtful smile. 'It's not put into his head to be buried. It's put into his head to be made useful. You hold your life on the condition that to the last you shall struggle hard for it. Every man holds a discovery on the same terms.'

'That is to say,' said Arthur, with a growing admiration of his quiet companion, 'you are not finally discouraged even now?'

'I have no right to be, if I am,' returned the other. 'The thing is as true as it ever was.'

When they had walked a little way in silence, Clennam, at once to change the direct point of their conversation and not to change it too abruptly, asked Mr Doyce if he had any partner in his business to relieve him of a portion of its anxieties?

'No,' he returned, 'not at present. I had when I first entered on it, and a good man he was. But he has been dead some years; and as I could not easily take to the notion of another when I lost him,

I bought his share for myself and have gone on by myself ever since. And here's another thing,' he said, stopping for a moment with a good-humoured laugh in his eyes, and laying his closed right hand, with its peculiar suppleness of thumb, on Clennam's arm, 'no inventor can be a man of business, you know.'

'No?' said Clennam.

'Why, so the men of business say,' he answered, resuming the walk and laughing outright. 'I don't know why we unfortunate creatures should be supposed to want common sense, but it is generally taken for granted that we do. Even the best friend I have in the world, our excellent friend over yonder,' said Doyce, nodding towards Twickenham, 'extends a sort of protection to me, don't you know, as a man not quite able to take care of himself?'

Arthur Clennam could not help joining in the good-humoured laugh, for he recognised the truth of the description.

'So I find that I must have a partner who is a man of business and not guilty of any inventions,' said Daniel Doyce, taking off his hat to pass his hand over his forehead, 'if it's only in deference to the current opinion, and to uphold the credit of the Works. I don't think he'll find that I have been very remiss or confused in my way of conducting them; but that's for him to say – whoever he is – not for me.'

'You have not chosen him yet, then?'

'No, sir, no. I have only just come to a decision to take one. The fact is, there's more to do than there used to be, and the

Works are enough for me as I grow older. What with the books and correspondence, and foreign journeys for which a Principal is necessary, I can't do all. I am going to talk over the best way of negotiating the matter, if I find a spare half-hour between this and Monday morning, with my – my Nurse and protector,' said Doyce, with laughing eyes again. 'He is a sagacious man in business, and has had a good apprenticeship to it.'

After this, they conversed on different subjects until they arrived at their journey's end. A composed and unobtrusive self-sustainment was noticeable in Daniel Doyce – a calm knowledge that what was true must remain true, in spite of all the Barnacles in the family ocean, and would be just the truth, and neither more nor less when even that sea had run dry – which had a kind of greatness in it, though not of the official quality.

As he knew the house well, he conducted Arthur to it by the way that showed it to the best advantage. It was a charming place (none the worse for being a little eccentric), on the road by the river, and just what the residence of the Meagles family ought to be. It stood in a garden, no doubt as fresh and beautiful in the May of the Year as Pet now was in the May of her life; and it was defended by a goodly show of handsome trees and spreading evergreens, as Pet was by Mr and Mrs Meagles. It was made out of an old brick house, of which a part had been altogether pulled down, and another part had been changed into the present cottage; so there was a hale elderly portion, to represent Mr and Mrs Meagles, and a young picturesque, very pretty portion to

represent Pet. There was even the later addition of a conservatory sheltering itself against it, uncertain of hue in its deep-stained glass, and in its more transparent portions flashing to the sun's rays, now like fire and now like harmless water drops; which might have stood for Tattycoram. Within view was the peaceful river and the ferry-boat, to moralise to all the inmates saying: Young or old, passionate or tranquil, chafing or content, you, thus runs the current always. Let the heart swell into what discord it will, thus plays the rippling water on the prow of the ferry-boat ever the same tune. Year after year, so much allowance for the drifting of the boat, so many miles an hour the flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet, upon this road that steadily runs away; while you, upon your flowing road of time, are so capricious and distracted.

The bell at the gate had scarcely sounded when Mr Meagles came out to receive them. Mr Meagles had scarcely come out, when Mrs Meagles came out. Mrs Meagles had scarcely come out, when Pet came out. Pet scarcely had come out, when Tattycoram came out. Never had visitors a more hospitable reception.

'Here we are, you see,' said Mr Meagles, 'boxed up, Mr Clennam, within our own home-limits, as if we were never going to expand – that is, travel – again. Not like Marseilles, eh? No allonging and marshonging here!'

'A different kind of beauty, indeed!' said Clennam, looking about him.

‘But, Lord bless me!’ cried Mr Meagles, rubbing his hands with a relish, ‘it was an uncommonly pleasant thing being in quarantine, wasn’t it? Do you know, I have often wished myself back again? We were a capital party.’

This was Mr Meagles’s invariable habit. Always to object to everything while he was travelling, and always to want to get back to it when he was not travelling.

‘If it was summer-time,’ said Mr Meagles, ‘which I wish it was on your account, and in order that you might see the place at its best, you would hardly be able to hear yourself speak for birds. Being practical people, we never allow anybody to scare the birds; and the birds, being practical people too, come about us in myriads. We are delighted to see you, Clennam (if you’ll allow me, I shall drop the Mister); I heartily assure you, we are delighted.’

‘I have not had so pleasant a greeting,’ said Clennam – then he recalled what Little Dorrit had said to him in his own room, and faithfully added ‘except once – since we last walked to and fro, looking down at the Mediterranean.’

‘Ah!’ returned Mr Meagles. ‘Something like a look out, *that* was, wasn’t it? I don’t want a military government, but I shouldn’t mind a little allonging and marshonging – just a dash of it – in this neighbourhood sometimes. It’s Devilish still.’

Bestowing this eulogium on the retired character of his retreat with a dubious shake of the head, Mr Meagles led the way into the house. It was just large enough, and no more; was

as pretty within as it was without, and was perfectly well-arranged and comfortable. Some traces of the migratory habits of the family were to be observed in the covered frames and furniture, and wrapped-up hangings; but it was easy to see that it was one of Mr Meagles's whims to have the cottage always kept, in their absence, as if they were always coming back the day after to-morrow. Of articles collected on his various expeditions, there was such a vast miscellany that it was like the dwelling of an amiable Corsair. There were antiquities from Central Italy, made by the best modern houses in that department of industry; bits of mummy from Egypt (and perhaps Birmingham); model gondolas from Venice; model villages from Switzerland; morsels of tesselated pavement from Herculaneum and Pompeii, like petrified minced veal; ashes out of tombs, and lava out of Vesuvius; Spanish fans, Spezzian straw hats, Moorish slippers, Tuscan hairpins, Carrara sculpture, Trastaverini scarves, Genoese velvets and filigree, Neapolitan coral, Roman cameos, Geneva jewellery, Arab lanterns, rosaries blest all round by the Pope himself, and an infinite variety of lumber. There were views, like and unlike, of a multitude of places; and there was one little picture-room devoted to a few of the regular sticky old Saints, with sinews like whipcord, hair like Neptune's, wrinkles like tattooing, and such coats of varnish that every holy personage served for a fly-trap, and became what is now called in the vulgar tongue a Catch-em-alive O. Of these pictorial acquisitions Mr Meagles spoke in the usual manner. He

was no judge, he said, except of what pleased himself; he had picked them up, dirt-cheap, and people *had* considered them rather fine. One man, who at any rate ought to know something of the subject, had declared that 'Sage, Reading' (a specially oily old gentleman in a blanket, with a swan's-down tippet for a beard, and a web of cracks all over him like rich pie-crust), to be a fine Guercino. As for Sebastian del Piombo there, you would judge for yourself; if it were not his later manner, the question was, Who was it? Titian, that might or might not be – perhaps he had only touched it. Daniel Doyce said perhaps he hadn't touched it, but Mr Meagles rather declined to overhear the remark.

When he had shown all his spoils, Mr Meagles took them into his own snug room overlooking the lawn, which was fitted up in part like a dressing-room and in part like an office, and in which, upon a kind of counter-desk, were a pair of brass scales for weighing gold, and a scoop for shovelling out money.

'Here they are, you see,' said Mr Meagles. 'I stood behind these two articles five-and-thirty years running, when I no more thought of gadding about than I now think of – staying at home. When I left the Bank for good, I asked for them, and brought them away with me. I mention it at once, or you might suppose that I sit in my counting-house (as Pet says I do), like the king in the poem of the four-and-twenty blackbirds, counting out my money.'

Clennam's eyes had strayed to a natural picture on the wall, of two pretty little girls with their arms entwined. 'Yes, Clennam,'

said Mr Meagles, in a lower voice. 'There they both are. It was taken some seventeen years ago. As I often say to Mother, they were babies then.'

'Their names?' said Arthur.

'Ah, to be sure! You have never heard any name but Pet. Pet's name is Minnie; her sister's Lillie.'

'Should you have known, Mr Clennam, that one of them was meant for me?' asked Pet herself, now standing in the doorway.

'I might have thought that both of them were meant for you, both are still so like you. Indeed,' said Clennam, glancing from the fair original to the picture and back, 'I cannot even now say which is not your portrait.'

'D'ye hear that, Mother?' cried Mr Meagles to his wife, who had followed her daughter. 'It's always the same, Clennam; nobody can decide. The child to your left is Pet.'

The picture happened to be near a looking-glass. As Arthur looked at it again, he saw, by the reflection of the mirror, Tattycoram stop in passing outside the door, listen to what was going on, and pass away with an angry and contemptuous frown upon her face, that changed its beauty into ugliness.

'But come!' said Mr Meagles. 'You have had a long walk, and will be glad to get your boots off. As to Daniel here, I suppose he'd never think of taking *his* boots off, unless we showed him a boot-jack.'

'Why not?' asked Daniel, with a significant smile at Clennam.

'Oh! You have so many things to think about,' returned Mr

Meagles, clapping him on the shoulder, as if his weakness must not be left to itself on any account. 'Figures, and wheels, and cogs, and levers, and screws, and cylinders, and a thousand things.'

'In my calling,' said Daniel, amused, 'the greater usually includes the less. But never mind, never mind! Whatever pleases you, pleases me.'

Clennam could not help speculating, as he seated himself in his room by the fire, whether there might be in the breast of this honest, affectionate, and cordial Mr Meagles, any microscopic portion of the mustard-seed that had sprung up into the great tree of the Circumlocution Office. His curious sense of a general superiority to Daniel Doyce, which seemed to be founded, not so much on anything in Doyce's personal character as on the mere fact of his being an originator and a man out of the beaten track of other men, suggested the idea. It might have occupied him until he went down to dinner an hour afterwards, if he had not had another question to consider, which had been in his mind so long ago as before he was in quarantine at Marseilles, and which had now returned to it, and was very urgent with it. No less a question than this: Whether he should allow himself to fall in love with Pet?

He was twice her age. (He changed the leg he had crossed over the other, and tried the calculation again, but could not bring out the total at less.) He was twice her age. Well! He was young in appearance, young in health and strength, young in heart. A man was certainly not old at forty; and many men were not in

circumstances to marry, or did not marry, until they had attained that time of life. On the other hand, the question was, not what he thought of the point, but what she thought of it.

He believed that Mr Meagles was disposed to entertain a ripe regard for him, and he knew that he had a sincere regard for Mr Meagles and his good wife. He could foresee that to relinquish this beautiful only child, of whom they were so fond, to any husband, would be a trial of their love which perhaps they never yet had had the fortitude to contemplate. But the more beautiful and winning and charming she, the nearer they must always be to the necessity of approaching it. And why not in his favour, as well as in another's?

When he had got so far, it came again into his head that the question was, not what they thought of it, but what she thought of it.

Arthur Clennam was a retiring man, with a sense of many deficiencies; and he so exalted the merits of the beautiful Minnie in his mind, and depressed his own, that when he pinned himself to this point, his hopes began to fail him. He came to the final resolution, as he made himself ready for dinner, that he would not allow himself to fall in love with Pet.

There were only five, at a round table, and it was very pleasant indeed. They had so many places and people to recall, and they were all so easy and cheerful together (Daniel Doyce either sitting out like an amused spectator at cards, or coming in with some shrewd little experiences of his own, when it happened to be to

the purpose), that they might have been together twenty times, and not have known so much of one another.

'And Miss Wade,' said Mr Meagles, after they had recalled a number of fellow-travellers. 'Has anybody seen Miss Wade?'

'I have,' said Tattycoram.

She had brought a little mantle which her young mistress had sent for, and was bending over her, putting it on, when she lifted up her dark eyes and made this unexpected answer.

'Tatty!' her young mistress exclaimed. 'You seen Miss Wade? – where?'

'Here, miss,' said Tattycoram.

'How?'

An impatient glance from Tattycoram seemed, as Clennam saw it, to answer 'With my eyes!' But her only answer in words was: 'I met her near the church.'

'What was she doing there I wonder!' said Mr Meagles. 'Not going to it, I should think.'

'She had written to me first,' said Tattycoram.

'Oh, Tatty!' murmured her mistress, 'take your hands away. I feel as if some one else was touching me!'

She said it in a quick involuntary way, but half playfully, and not more petulantly or disagreeably than a favourite child might have done, who laughed next moment. Tattycoram set her full red lips together, and crossed her arms upon her bosom.

'Did you wish to know, sir,' she said, looking at Mr Meagles, 'what Miss Wade wrote to me about?'

‘Well, Tattycoram,’ returned Mr Meagles, ‘since you ask the question, and we are all friends here, perhaps you may as well mention it, if you are so inclined.’

‘She knew, when we were travelling, where you lived,’ said Tattycoram, ‘and she had seen me not quite – not quite – ’

‘Not quite in a good temper, Tattycoram?’ suggested Mr Meagles, shaking his head at the dark eyes with a quiet caution. ‘Take a little time – count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.’

She pressed her lips together again, and took a long deep breath.

‘So she wrote to me to say that if I ever felt myself hurt,’ she looked down at her young mistress, ‘or found myself worried,’ she looked down at her again, ‘I might go to her, and be considerately treated. I was to think of it, and could speak to her by the church. So I went there to thank her.’

‘Tatty,’ said her young mistress, putting her hand up over her shoulder that the other might take it, ‘Miss Wade almost frightened me when we parted, and I scarcely like to think of her just now as having been so near me without my knowing it. Tatty dear!’

Tatty stood for a moment, immovable.

‘Hey?’ cried Mr Meagles. ‘Count another five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.’

She might have counted a dozen, when she bent and put her lips to the caressing hand. It patted her cheek, as it touched the owner’s beautiful curls, and Tattycoram went away.

‘Now there,’ said Mr Meagles softly, as he gave a turn to the dumb-waiter on his right hand to twirl the sugar towards himself. ‘There’s a girl who might be lost and ruined, if she wasn’t among practical people. Mother and I know, solely from being practical, that there are times when that girl’s whole nature seems to roughen itself against seeing us so bound up in Pet. No father and mother were bound up in her, poor soul. I don’t like to think of the way in which that unfortunate child, with all that passion and protest in her, feels when she hears the Fifth Commandment on a Sunday. I am always inclined to call out, Church, Count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.’

Besides his dumb-waiter, Mr Meagles had two other not dumb waiters in the persons of two parlour-maids with rosy faces and bright eyes, who were a highly ornamental part of the table decoration. ‘And why not, you see?’ said Mr Meagles on this head. ‘As I always say to Mother, why not have something pretty to look at, if you have anything at all?’

A certain Mrs Tickit, who was Cook and Housekeeper when the family were at home, and Housekeeper only when the family were away, completed the establishment. Mr Meagles regretted that the nature of the duties in which she was engaged, rendered Mrs Tickit unpresentable at present, but hoped to introduce her to the new visitor to-morrow. She was an important part of the Cottage, he said, and all his friends knew her. That was her picture up in the corner. When they went away, she always put on the silk-gown and the jet-black row of curls represented in that

portrait (her hair was reddish-grey in the kitchen), established herself in the breakfast-room, put her spectacles between two particular leaves of Doctor Buchan's Domestic Medicine, and sat looking over the blind all day until they came back again. It was supposed that no persuasion could be invented which would induce Mrs Tickit to abandon her post at the blind, however long their absence, or to dispense with the attendance of Dr Buchan; the lucubrations of which learned practitioner, Mr Meagles implicitly believed she had never yet consulted to the extent of one word in her life.

In the evening they played an old-fashioned rubber; and Pet sat looking over her father's hand, or singing to herself by fits and starts at the piano. She was a spoilt child; but how could she be otherwise? Who could be much with so pliable and beautiful a creature, and not yield to her endearing influence? Who could pass an evening in the house, and not love her for the grace and charm of her very presence in the room? This was Clennam's reflection, notwithstanding the final conclusion at which he had arrived up-stairs.

In making it, he revoked. 'Why, what are you thinking of, my good sir?' asked the astonished Mr Meagles, who was his partner. 'I beg your pardon. Nothing,' returned Clennam. 'Think of something, next time; that's a dear fellow,' said Mr Meagles. Pet laughingly believed he had been thinking of Miss Wade. 'Why of Miss Wade, Pet?' asked her father. 'Why, indeed!' said Arthur Clennam. Pet coloured a little, and went to the piano

again.

As they broke up for the night, Arthur overheard Doyce ask his host if he could give him half an hour's conversation before breakfast in the morning? The host replying willingly, Arthur lingered behind a moment, having his own word to add to that topic.

'Mr Meagles,' he said, on their being left alone, 'do you remember when you advised me to go straight to London?'

'Perfectly well.'

'And when you gave me some other good advice which I needed at that time?'

'I won't say what it was worth,' answered Mr Meagles: 'but of course I remember our being very pleasant and confidential together.'

'I have acted on your advice; and having disembarrassed myself of an occupation that was painful to me for many reasons, wish to devote myself and what means I have, to another pursuit.'

'Right! You can't do it too soon,' said Mr Meagles.

'Now, as I came down to-day, I found that your friend, Mr Doyce, is looking for a partner in his business – not a partner in his mechanical knowledge, but in the ways and means of turning the business arising from it to the best account.'

'Just so,' said Mr Meagles, with his hands in his pockets, and with the old business expression of face that had belonged to the scales and scoop.

'Mr Doyce mentioned incidentally, in the course of our

conversation, that he was going to take your valuable advice on the subject of finding such a partner. If you should think our views and opportunities at all likely to coincide, perhaps you will let him know my available position. I speak, of course, in ignorance of the details, and they may be unsuitable on both sides.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' said Mr Meagles, with the caution belonging to the scales and scoop.

'But they will be a question of figures and accounts – '

'Just so, just so,' said Mr Meagles, with arithmetical solidity belonging to the scales and scoop.

' – And I shall be glad to enter into the subject, provided Mr Doyce responds, and you think well of it. If you will at present, therefore, allow me to place it in your hands, you will much oblige me.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.