Little Dorrit
Vol.II

By
Charles Dickens

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CHAPTER 23.

Machinery in Motion

Mr Meagles bestirred himself with such prompt activity in the matter of the negotiation with Daniel Doyce which Clennam had entrusted to him, that he soon brought it into business train, and called on Clennam at nine o'clock one morning to make his report. 'Doyce is highly gratified by your good opinion,' he opened the business by saying, 'and desires nothing so much as that you should examine the affairs of the Works for yourself, and entirely understand them. He has handed me the keys of all his books and papershere they are jingling in this pocketand the only charge he has given me is "Let Mr Clennam have the means of putting himself on a perfect equality with me as to knowing whatever I know. If it should come to nothing after all, he will respect my confidence. Unless I was sure of that to begin with, I should have nothing to

do with him." And there, you see,' said Mr Meagles, 'you have Daniel Doyce all over.'

'A very honourable character.'

'Oh, yes, to be sure. Not a doubt of it. Odd, but very honourable. Very odd though. Now, would you believe, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, with a hearty enjoyment of his friend's eccentricity, 'that I had a whole morning in What'shisname Yard'

'Bleeding Heart?'

'A whole morning in Bleeding Heart Yard, before I could induce him to pursue the subject at all?'

'How was that?'

'How was that, my friend? I no sooner mentioned your name in connection with it than he declared off.'

'Declared off on my account?'

'I no sooner mentioned your name, Clennam, than he said, "That will never do!" What did he mean by that? I asked him. No matter, Meagles; that would never do. Why would it never do? You'll hardly believe it, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, laughing within himself, 'but it came out that it would never do, because you and he, walking down to Twickenham together, had glided into a friendly conversation in the course of which he had referred to his intention of taking a partner, supposing at the time that you were as firmly and finally settled as St Paul's Cathedral. "Whereas," says he, "Mr Clennam might now believe, if I entertained his proposition, that I had a sinister and designing motive in what was open free speech. Which I can't bear," says he, "which I really am too proud to bear."'

'I should as soon suspect'

'Of course you would,' interrupted Mr Meagles, 'and so I told him. But it took a morning to scale that wall; and I doubt if any other man than myself (he likes me of old) could have got his leg over it. Well, Clennam. This businesslike obstacle surmounted, he then stipulated that before resuming with you I should look over the books and form my own opinion. I looked over the books, and formed my own opinion. "Is it, on the whole, for, or against?" says he. "For," says I. "Then," says he, "you may now, my good friend, give Mr Clennam the means of forming his opinion. To enable him to do which, without bias and with perfect freedom, I shall go out of town for a week." And he's gone,' said Mr Meagles; that's the rich conclusion of the thing.'

'Leaving me,' said Clennam, 'with a high sense, I must say, of his candour and his'

'Oddity,' Mr Meagles struck in. 'I should think so!'

It was not exactly the word on Clennam's lips, but he forbore to interrupt his goodhumoured friend.

'And now,' added Mr Meagles, 'you can begin to look into matters as soon as you think proper. I have undertaken to explain where you may want explanation, but to be strictly impartial, and to do nothing more.'

They began their perquisitions in Bleeding Heart Yard that same forenoon. Little peculiarities were easily to be detected by experienced eyes in Mr Doyce's way of managing his affairs, but they almost always involved some ingenious simplification of a difficulty, and some plain road to the desired end. That his papers were in arrear, and that he stood in need of assistance to develop the capacity of his business, was clear enough; but all the results of his undertakings during many years were distinctly set forth, and were ascertainable with ease. Nothing had been done for the purposes of the pending investigation; everything was in its genuine working dress, and in a certain honest rugged order. The calculations and entries, in his own hand, of which there were many, were bluntly written, and with no very neat precision; but were always plain and directed straight to the purpose. It occurred to Arthur that a far more elaborate and taking show of businesssuch as the records of the Circumlocution Office made perhapsmight be far less serviceable, as being meant to be far less intelligible.

Three or four days of steady application tendered him master of all the facts it was essential to become acquainted with. Mr Meagles was at hand the whole time, always ready to illuminate any dim place with the bright little safetylamp belonging to the scales and scoop. Between them they agreed upon the sum it would be fair to offer for the purchase of a halfshare in the business, and then Mr Meagles unsealed a paper in which Daniel Doyce had noted the amount at which he valued it; which was even something less. Thus, when Daniel came back, he found the affair as good as concluded.

'And I may now avow, Mr Clennam,' said he, with a cordial shake of the hand, 'that if I had looked high and low for a partner, I believe I could not have found one more to my mind.'

'I say the same,' said Clennam.

'And I say of both of you,' added Mr Meagles, 'that you are well matched. You keep him in check, Clennam, with your common sense, and you stick to the Works, Dan, with your'

'Uncommon sense?' suggested Daniel, with his quiet smile.

'You may call it so, if you likeand each of you will be a right hand to the other. Here's my own right hand upon it, as a practical man, to both of you.'

The purchase was completed within a month. It left Arthur in possession of private personal means not exceeding a few hundred pounds; but it opened to him an active and promising career. The three friends dined together on the auspicious occasion; the factory and the factory wives and children made holiday and dined too; even Bleeding Heart Yard dined and was full of meat. Two months had barely gone by in all, when Bleeding Heart Yard had become so familiar with shortcommons again, that the treat was forgotten there; when nothing seemed new in the partnership but the paint of the inscription on the doorposts, DOYCE AND CLENNAM; when it appeared even to Clennam himself, that he had had the affairs of the firm in his mind for years.

The little countinghouse reserved for his own occupation, was a room of wood and glass at the end of a long low workshop, filled with benches, and vices, and tools, and straps, and wheels; which, when they were in gear with the steamengine, went tearing round as though they had a suicidal mission to grind the business to dust and tear the factory to pieces. A communication of great trapdoors in the floor and roof with the workshop above and the workshop below, made a shaft of light in this perspective, which brought to Clennam's mind the child's old picturebook, where similar rays were the witnesses of Abel's murder. The noises were sufficiently removed and shut out from the countinghouse to blend into a busy hum, interspersed with periodical clinks and thumps. The patient figures at work were swarthy with the filings of iron and steel that danced on every bench and bubbled up through every chink in the planking. The workshop was arrived at by a stepladder from the outer yard below, where it served as a shelter for the large grindstone where tools were sharpened. The whole had at once a fanciful and practical air in Clennam's eyes, which was a welcome change; and, as often as he raised them from his first work of getting the array of business documents into perfect order, he glanced at these things with a feeling of pleasure in his pursuit that was new to him.

Raising his eyes thus one day, he was surprised to see a bonnet labouring up the stepladder. The unusual apparition was followed by another bonnet. He then perceived that the first bonnet was on the head of Mr F.'s Aunt, and that the second bonnet was on the head of Flora, who seemed to have propelled her legacy up the steep ascent with considerable difficulty. Though not altogether enraptured at the sight of these visitors, Clennam lost no time in opening the countinghouse door, and extricating them from the workshop; a rescue which was rendered the more necessary by Mr F.'s Aunt already stumbling over some

impediment, and menacing steam power as an Institution with a stony reticule she carried.

'Good gracious, Arthur,I should say Mr Clennam, far more properthe climb we have had to get up here and how ever to get down again without a fireescape and Mr F.'s Aunt slipping through the steps and bruised all over and you in the machinery and foundry way too only think, and never told us!'

Thus, Flora, out of breath. Meanwhile, Mr F.'s Aunt rubbed her esteemed insteps with her umbrella, and vindictively glared.

'Most unkind never to have come back to see us since that day, though naturally it was not to be expected that there should be any attraction at our house and you were much more pleasantly engaged, that's pretty certain, and is she fair or dark blue eyes or black I wonder, not that I expect that she should be anything but a perfect contrast to me in all particulars for I am a disappointment as I very well know and you are quite right to be devoted no doubt though what I am saying Arthur never mind I hardly know myself Good gracious!'

By this time he had placed chairs for them in the countinghouse. As Flora dropped into hers, she bestowed the old look upon him.

'And to think of Doyce and Clennam, and who Doyce can be,' said Flora; 'delightful man no doubt and married perhaps or perhaps a daughter, now has he really? then one understands the partnership and sees it all, don't tell me anything about it for I know I have no claim to ask the question the golden chain that once was forged being snapped and very proper.'

Flora put her hand tenderly on his, and gave him another of the youthful glances.

'Dear Arthurforce of habit, Mr Clennam every way more delicate and adapted to existing circumstancesI must beg to be excused for taking the liberty of this intrusion but I thought I might so far presume upon old times for ever faded never more to bloom as to call with Mr F.'s Aunt to congratulate and offer best wishes, A great deal superior to China not to be denied and much nearer though higher up!'

'I am very happy to see you,' said Clennam, 'and I thank you, Flora, very much for your kind remembrance.'

'More than I can say myself at any rate,' returned Flora, 'for I might have been dead and buried twenty distinct times over and no doubt whatever should have been before you had genuinely remembered Me or anything like it in spite of which one last remark I wish to make, one last explanation I wish to offer'

'My dear Mrs Finching,' Arthur remonstrated in alarm.

'Oh not that disagreeable name, say Flora!'

'Flora, is it worth troubling yourself afresh to enter into explanations? I assure you none are needed. I am satisfiedI am perfectly satisfied.'

A diversion was occasioned here, by Mr F.'s Aunt making the following inexorable and awful statement:

'There's milestones on the Dover road!'

With such mortal hostility towards the human race did she discharge this missile, that Clennam was quite at a loss how to defend himself; the rather as he had been already perplexed in his mind by the honour of a visit from this venerable lady, when it was plain she held him in the utmost abhorrence. He could not but look at her with disconcertment, as she sat breathing bitterness and scorn, and staring leagues away. Flora, however, received the remark as if it had been of a most apposite and agreeable nature; approvingly observing aloud that Mr F.'s Aunt had a great deal of spirit. Stimulated either by this compliment, or by her burning indignation, that illustrious woman then added, 'Let him meet it if he can!' And, with a rigid movement of her stony reticule (an appendage of great size and of a fossil appearance), indicated that Clennam was the unfortunate person at whom the challenge was hurled.

'One last remark,' resumed Flora, 'I was going to say I wish to make one last explanation I wish to offer, Mr F.'s Aunt and myself would not have intruded on business hours Mr F. having been in business and though the wine trade still business is equally business call it what you will and business habits are just the same as witness Mr F. himself who had his slippers always on the mat at ten minutes before six in the afternoon and his boots inside the fender at ten minutes before eight in the morning to the moment in all weathers light or darkwould not therefore have intruded without a motive which being kindly meant it may be hoped will be kindly taken Arthur, Mr Clennam far more proper, even Doyce and Clennam probably more businesslike.'

'Pray say nothing in the way of apology,' Arthur entreated. 'You are always welcome.'

'Very polite of you to say so Arthurcannot remember Mr Clennam until the word is out, such is the habit of times for ever fled, and so true it is that oft in the stilly night ere slumber's chain has bound people, fond memory brings the light of other days around peoplevery polite but more polite than true I am afraid, for to go into the machinery business without so much as sending a line or a card to papaI don't say me though there was a time but that is past and stern reality has now my gracious never minddoes not look like it you must

confess.'

Even Flora's commas seemed to have fled on this occasion; she was so much more disjointed and voluble than in the preceding interview.

'Though indeed,' she hurried on, 'nothing else is to be expected and why should it be expected and if it's not to be expected why should it be, and I am far from blaming you or any one, When your mama and my papa worried us to death and severed the golden bowlI mean bond but I dare say you know what I mean and if you don't you don't lose much and care just as little I will venture to addwhen they severed the golden bond that bound us and threw us into fits of crying on the sofa nearly choked at least myself everything was changed and in giving my hand to Mr F. I know I did so with my eyes open but he was so very unsettled and in such low spirits that he had distractedly alluded to the river if not oil of something from the chemist's and I did it for the best.'

'My good Flora, we settled that before. It was all quite right.'

'It's perfectly clear you think so,' returned Flora, 'for you take it very coolly, if I hadn't known it to be China I should have guessed myself the Polar regions, dear Mr Clennam you are right however and I cannot blame you but as to Doyce and Clennam papa's property being about here we heard it from Pancks and but for him we never should have heard one word about it I am satisfied.'

'No, no, don't say that.'

'What nonsense not to say it ArthurDoyce and Clennameasier and less trying to me than Mr Clennamwhen I know it and you know it too and can't deny it.'

'But I do deny it, Flora. I should soon have made you a friendly visit.'

'Ah!' said Flora, tossing her head. 'I dare say!' and she gave him another of the old looks. 'However when Pancks told us I made up my mind that Mr F.'s Aunt and I would come and call because when papawhich was before thathappened to mention her name to me and to say that you were interested in her I said at the moment Good gracious why not have her here then when there's anything to do instead of putting it out.'

'When you say Her,' observed Clennam, by this time pretty well bewildered, 'do you mean Mr F.'s'

'My goodness, ArthurDoyce and Clennam really easier to me with old remembranceswho ever heard of Mr F.'s Aunt doing needlework and going out by the day?'

'Going out by the day! Do you speak of Little Dorrit?' 'Why yes of course,' returned Flora; 'and of all the strangest names I ever heard the strangest, like a

place down in the country with a turnpike, or a favourite pony or a puppy or a bird or something from a seedshop to be put in a garden or a flowerpot and come up speckled.'

'Then, Flora,' said Arthur, with a sudden interest in the conversation, 'Mr Casby was so kind as to mention Little Dorrit to you, was he? What did he say?'

'Oh you know what papa is,' rejoined Flora, 'and how aggravatingly he sits looking beautiful and turning his thumbs over and over one another till he makes one giddy if one keeps one's eyes upon him, he said when we were talking of youI don't know who began the subject Arthur (Doyce and Clennam) but I am sure it wasn't me, at least I hope not but you really must excuse my confessing more on that point.'

'Certainly,' said Arthur. 'By all means.'

'You are very ready,' pouted Flora, coming to a sudden stop in a captivating bashfulness, 'that I must admit, Papa said you had spoken of her in an earnest way and I said what I have told you and that's all.'

'That's all?' said Arthur, a little disappointed.

'Except that when Pancks told us of your having embarked in this business and with difficulty persuaded us that it was really you I said to Mr F.'s Aunt then we would come and ask you if it would be agreeable to all parties that she should be engaged at our house when required for I know she often goes to your mama's and I know that your mama has a very touchy temper ArthurDoyce and Clennamor I never might have married Mr F. and might have been at this hour but I am running into nonsense.'

'It was very kind of you, Flora, to think of this.'

Poor Flora rejoined with a plain sincerity which became her better than her youngest glances, that she was glad he thought so. She said it with so much heart that Clennam would have given a great deal to buy his old character of her on the spot, and throw itand the mermaid away for ever'I think, Flora,' he said, 'that the employment you can give Little Dorrit, and the kindness you can show her'

'Yes and I will,' said Flora, quickly.

'I am sure of itwill be a great assistance and support to her. I do not feel that I have the right to tell you what I know of her, for I acquired the knowledge confidentially, and under circumstances that bind me to silence. But I have an interest in the little creature, and a respect for her that I cannot express to you. Her life has been one of such trial and devotion, and such quiet goodness, as

you can scarcely imagine. I can hardly think of her, far less speak of her, without feeling moved. Let that feeling represent what I could tell you, and commit her to your friendliness with my thanks.'

Once more he put out his hand frankly to poor Flora; once more poor Flora couldn't accept it frankly, found it worth nothing openly, must make the old intrigue and mystery of it. As much to her own enjoyment as to his dismay, she covered it with a corner of her shawl as she took it. Then, looking towards the glass front of the countinghouse, and seeing two figures approaching, she cried with infinite relish, 'Papa! Hush, Arthur, for Mercy's sake!' and tottered back to her chair with an amazing imitation of being in danger of swooning, in the dread surprise and maidenly flutter of her spirits.

The Patriarch, meanwhile, came inanely beaming towards the countinghouse in the wake of Pancks. Pancks opened the door for him, towed him in, and retired to his own moorings in a corner.

'I heard from Flora,' said the Patriarch with his benevolent smile, 'that she was coming to call, coming to call. And being out, I thought I'd come also, thought I'd come also.'

The benign wisdom he infused into this declaration (not of itself profound), by means of his blue eyes, his shining head, and his long white hair, was most impressive. It seemed worth putting down among the noblest sentiments enunciated by the best of men. Also, when he said to Clennam, seating himself in the proffered chair, 'And you are in a new business, Mr Clennam? I wish you well, sir, I wish you well!' he seemed to have done benevolent wonders.

'Mrs Finching has been telling me, sir,' said Arthur, after making his acknowledgments; the relict of the late Mr F. meanwhile protesting, with a gesture, against his use of that respectable name; 'that she hopes occasionally to employ the young needlewoman you recommended to my mother. For which I have been thanking her.'

The Patriarch turning his head in a lumbering way towards Pancks, that assistant put up the notebook in which he had been absorbed, and took him in tow.

'You didn't recommend her, you know,' said Pancks; 'how could you? You knew nothing about her, you didn't. The name was mentioned to you, and you passed it on. That's what YOU did.'

'Well!' said Clennam. 'As she justifies any recommendation, it is much the same thing.'

'You are glad she turns out well,' said Pancks, 'but it wouldn't have been your

fault if she had turned out ill. The credit's not yours as it is, and the blame wouldn't have been yours as it might have been. You gave no guarantee. You knew nothing about her.' 'You are not acquainted, then,' said Arthur, hazarding a random question, 'with any of her family?'

'Acquainted with any of her family?' returned Pancks. 'How should you be acquainted with any of her family? You never heard of 'em. You can't be acquainted with people you never heard of, can you? You should think not!'

All this time the Patriarch sat serenely smiling; nodding or shaking his head benevolently, as the case required.

'As to being a reference,' said Pancks, 'you know, in a general way, what being a reference means. It's all your eye, that is! Look at your tenants down the Yard here. They'd all be references for one another, if you'd let 'em. What would be the good of letting 'em? It's no satisfaction to be done by two men instead of one. One's enough. A person who can't pay, gets another person who can't pay, to guarantee that he can pay. Like a person with two wooden legs getting another person with two wooden legs, to guarantee that he has got two natural legs. It don't make either of them able to do a walking match. And four wooden legs are more troublesome to you than two, when you don't want any.' Mr Pancks concluded by blowing off that steam of his.

A momentary silence that ensued was broken by Mr F.'s Aunt, who had been sitting upright in a cataleptic state since her last public remark. She now underwent a violent twitch, calculated to produce a startling effect on the nerves of the uninitiated, and with the deadliest animosity observed:

'You can't make a head and brains out of a brass knob with nothing in it. You couldn't do it when your Uncle George was living; much less when he's dead.'

Mr Pancks was not slow to reply, with his usual calmness, 'Indeed, ma'am! Bless my soul! I'm surprised to hear it.' Despite his presence of mind, however, the speech of Mr F.'s Aunt produced a depressing effect on the little assembly; firstly, because it was impossible to disguise that Clennam's unoffending head was the particular temple of reason depreciated; and secondly, because nobody ever knew on these occasions whose Uncle George was referred to, or what spectral presence might be invoked under that appellation.

Therefore Flora said, though still not without a certain boastfulness and triumph in her legacy, that Mr F.'s Aunt was 'very lively today, and she thought they had better go.' But Mr F.'s Aunt proved so lively as to take the suggestion in unexpected dudgeon and declare that she would not go; adding, with several injurious expressions, that if 'He'too evidently meaning Clennamwanted to get rid of her, 'let him chuck her out of winder;' and urgently expressing her desire

to see 'Him' perform that ceremony.

In this dilemma, Mr Pancks, whose resources appeared equal to any emergency in the Patriarchal waters, slipped on his hat, slipped out at the countinghouse door, and slipped in again a moment afterwards with an artificial freshness upon him, as if he had been in the country for some weeks. 'Why, bless my heart, ma'am!' said Mr Pancks, rubbing up his hair in great astonishment, 'is that you?

How do you do, ma'am? You are looking charming today! I am delighted to see you. Favour me with your arm, ma'am; we'll have a little walk together, you and me, if you'll honour me with your company.' And so escorted Mr F.'s Aunt down the private staircase of the countinghouse with great gallantry and success. The patriarchal Mr Casby then rose with the air of having done it himself, and blandly followed: leaving his daughter, as she followed in her turn, to remark to her former lover in a distracted whisper (which she very much enjoyed), that they had drained the cup of life to the dregs; and further to hint mysteriously that the late Mr F. was at the bottom of it.

Alone again, Clennam became a prey to his old doubts in reference to his mother and Little Dorrit, and revolved the old thoughts and suspicions. They were all in his mind, blending themselves with the duties he was mechanically discharging, when a shadow on his papers caused him to look up for the cause. The cause was Mr Pancks. With his hat thrown back upon his ears as if his wiry prongs of hair had darted up like springs and cast it off, with his jetblack beads of eyes inquisitively sharp, with the fingers of his right hand in his mouth that he might bite the nails, and with the fingers of his left hand in reserve in his pocket for another course, Mr Pancks cast his shadow through the glass upon the books and papers.

Mr Pancks asked, with a little inquiring twist of his head, if he might come in again? Clennam replied with a nod of his head in the affirmative. Mr Pancks worked his way in, came alongside the desk, made himself fast by leaning his arms upon it, and started conversation with a puff and a snort.

'Mr F.'s Aunt is appeased, I hope?' said Clennam.

'All right, sir,' said Pancks.

'I am so unfortunate as to have awakened a strong animosity in the breast of that lady,' said Clennam. 'Do you know why?'

'Does SHE know why?' said Pancks.

'I suppose not.'

'I suppose not,' said Pancks.

He took out his notebook, opened it, shut it, dropped it into his hat, which was beside him on the desk, and looked in at it as it lay at the bottom of the hat: all with a great appearance of consideration.

'Mr Clennam,' he then began, 'I am in want of information, sir.'

'Connected with this firm?' asked Clennam.

'No,' said Pancks.

'With what then, Mr Pancks? That is to say, assuming that you want it of me.'

'Yes, sir; yes, I want it of you,' said Pancks, 'if I can persuade you to furnish it. A, B, C, D. DA, DE, DI, DO. Dictionary order.

Dorrit. That's the name, sir?'

Mr Pancks blew off his peculiar noise again, and fell to at his righthand nails. Arthur looked searchingly at him; he returned the look.

'I don't understand you, Mr Pancks.'

'That's the name that I want to know about.'

'And what do you want to know?'

'Whatever you can and will tell me.' This comprehensive summary of his desires was not discharged without some heavy labouring on the part of Mr Pancks's machinery.

'This is a singular visit, Mr Pancks. It strikes me as rather extraordinary that you should come, with such an object, to me.'

'It may be all extraordinary together,' returned Pancks. 'It may be out of the ordinary course, and yet be business. In short, it is business. I am a man of business. What business have I in this present world, except to stick to business? No business.'

With his former doubt whether this dry hard personage were quite in earnest, Clennam again turned his eyes attentively upon his face. It was as scrubby and dingy as ever, and as eager and quick as ever, and he could see nothing lurking in it that was at all expressive of a latent mockery that had seemed to strike upon his ear in the voice.

'Now,' said Pancks, 'to put this business on its own footing, it's not my proprietor's.'

'Do you refer to Mr Casby as your proprietor?'

Pancks nodded. 'My proprietor. Put a case. Say, at my proprietor's I hear

namename of young person Mr Clennam wants to serve. Say, name first mentioned to my proprietor by Plornish in the Yard. Say, I go to Plornish. Say, I ask Plornish as a matter of business for information. Say, Plornish, though six weeks in arrear to my proprietor, declines. Say, Mrs Plornish declines. Say, both refer to Mr Clennam. Put the case.' 'Well?'

'Well, sir,' returned Pancks, 'say, I come to him. Say, here I am.'

With those prongs of hair sticking up all over his head, and his breath coming and going very hard and short, the busy Pancks fell back a step (in Tug metaphor, took half a turn astern) as if to show his dingy hull complete, then forged ahead again, and directed his quick glance by turns into his hat where his notebook was, and into Clennam's face.

'Mr Pancks, not to trespass on your grounds of mystery, I will be as plain with you as I can. Let me ask two questions. First'

'All right!' said Pancks, holding up his dirty forefinger with his broken nail. 'I see! "What's your motive?"'

'Exactly.'

'Motive,' said Pancks, 'good. Nothing to do with my proprietor; not stateable at present, ridiculous to state at present; but good.

Desiring to serve young person, name of Dorrit,' said Pancks, with his forefinger still up as a caution. 'Better admit motive to be good.'

'Secondly, and lastly, what do you want to know?'

Mr Pancks fished up his notebook before the question was put, and buttoning it with care in an inner breastpocket, and looking straight at Clennam all the time, replied with a pause and a puff, 'I want supplementary information of any sort.'

Clennam could not withhold a smile, as the panting little steamtug, so useful to that unwieldy ship, the Casby, waited on and watched him as if it were seeking an opportunity of running in and rifling him of all he wanted before he could resist its manoeuvres; though there was that in Mr Pancks's eagerness, too, which awakened many wondering speculations in his mind. After a little consideration, he resolved to supply Mr Pancks with such leading information as it was in his power to impart him; well knowing that Mr Pancks, if he failed in his present research, was pretty sure to find other means of getting it.

He, therefore, first requesting Mr Pancks to remember his voluntary declaration that his proprietor had no part in the disclosure, and that his own intentions were good (two declarations which that coaly little gentleman with

the greatest ardour repeated), openly told him that as to the Dorrit lineage or former place of habitation, he had no information to communicate, and that his knowledge of the family did not extend beyond the fact that it appeared to be now reduced to five members; namely, to two brothers, of whom one was single, and one a widower with three children. The ages of the whole family he made known to Mr Pancks, as nearly as he could guess at them; and finally he described to him the position of the Father of the Marshalsea, and the course of time and events through which he had become invested with that character. To all this, Mr Pancks, snorting and blowing in a more and more portentous manner as he became more interested, listened with great attention; appearing to derive the most agreeable sensations from the painfullest parts of the narrative, and particularly to be quite charmed by the account of William Dorrit's long imprisonment.

'In conclusion, Mr Pancks,' said Arthur, 'I have but to say this. I have reasons beyond a personal regard for speaking as little as I can of the Dorrit family, particularly at my mother's house' (Mr Pancks nodded), 'and for knowing as much as I can. So devoted a man of business as you areeh?'

For Mr Pancks had suddenly made that blowing effort with unusual force.

'It's nothing,' said Pancks.

'So devoted a man of business as yourself has a perfect understanding of a fair bargain. I wish to make a fair bargain with you, that you shall enlighten me concerning the Dorrit family when you have it in your power, as I have enlightened you. It may not give you a very flattering idea of my business habits, that I failed to make my terms beforehand,' continued Clennam; 'but I prefer to make them a point of honour. I have seen so much business done on sharp principles that, to tell you the truth, Mr Pancks, I am tired of them.'

Mr Pancks laughed. 'It's a bargain, sir,' said he. 'You shall find me stick to it.'

After that, he stood a little while looking at Clennam, and biting his ten nails all round; evidently while he fixed in his mind what he had been told, and went over it carefully, before the means of supplying a gap in his memory should be no longer at hand. 'It's all right,' he said at last, 'and now I'll wish you good day, as it's collecting day in the Yard. Bythebye, though. A lame foreigner with a stick.'

'Ay, ay. You do take a reference sometimes, I see?' said Clennam.

'When he can pay, sir,' replied Pancks. 'Take all you can get, and keep back all you can't be forced to give up. That's business. The lame foreigner with the stick wants a top room down the Yard. Is he good for it?'

'I am,' said Clennam, 'and I will answer for him.'

'That's enough. What I must have of Bleeding Heart Yard,' said Pancks, making a note of the case in his book, 'is my bond. I want my bond, you see. Pay up, or produce your property! That's the watchword down the Yard. The lame foreigner with the stick represented that you sent him; but he could represent (as far as that goes) that the Great Mogul sent him. He has been in the hospital, I believe?'

'Yes. Through having met with an accident. He is only just now discharged.'

'It's pauperising a man, sir, I have been shown, to let him into a hospital?' said Pancks. And again blew off that remarkable sound.

'I have been shown so too,' said Clennam, coldly.

Mr Pancks, being by that time quite ready for a start, got under steam in a moment, and, without any other signal or ceremony, was snorting down the stepladder and working into Bleeding Heart Yard, before he seemed to be well out of the countinghouse.

Throughout the remainder of the day, Bleeding Heart Yard was in consternation, as the grim Pancks cruised in it; haranguing the inhabitants on their backslidings in respect of payment, demanding his bond, breathing notices to quit and executions, running down defaulters, sending a swell of terror on before him, and leaving it in his wake. Knots of people, impelled by a fatal attraction, lurked outside any house in which he was known to be, listening for fragments of his discourses to the inmates; and, when he was rumoured to be coming down the stairs, often could not disperse so quickly but that he would be prematurely in among them, demanding their own arrears, and rooting them to the spot. Throughout the remainder of the day, Mr Pancks's What were they up to? and What did they mean by it? sounded all over the Yard. Mr Pancks wouldn't hear of excuses, wouldn't hear of complaints, wouldn't hear of repairs, wouldn't hear of anything but unconditional money down. Perspiring and puffing and darting about in eccentric directions, and becoming hotter and dingier every moment, he lashed the tide of the yard into a most agitated and turbid state. It had not settled down into calm water again full two hours after he had been seen fuming away on the horizon at the top of the steps.There were several small assemblages of the Bleeding Hearts at the popular points of meeting in the Yard that night, among whom it was universally agreed that Mr Pancks was a hard man to have to do with; and that it was much to be regretted, so it was, that a gentleman like Mr Casby should put his rents in his hands, and never know him in his true light. For (said the Bleeding Hearts), if a gentleman with that head of hair and them eyes took his rents into his own hands, ma'am, there

would be none of this worriting and wearing, and things would be very different.

At which identical evening hour and minute, the Patriarchwho had floated serenely through the Yard in the forenoon before the harrying began, with the express design of getting up this trustfulness in his shining bumps and silken locksat which identical hour and minute, that firstrate humbug of a thousand guns was heavily floundering in the little Dock of his exhausted Tug at home, and was saying, as he turned his thumbs:

'A very bad day's work, Pancks, very bad day's work. It seems to me, sir, and I must insist on making this observation forcibly in justice to myself, that you ought to have got much more money, much more money.'

CHAPTER 24.

FortuneTelling

Little Dorrit received a call that same evening from Mr Plornish, who, having intimated that he wished to speak to her privately, in a series of coughs so very noticeable as to favour the idea that her father, as regarded her seamstress occupation, was an illustration of the axiom that there are no such stoneblind men as those who will not see, obtained an audience with her on the common staircase outside the door.

'There's been a lady at our place today, Miss Dorrit,' Plornish growled, 'and another one along with her as is a old wixen if ever I met with such. The way she snapped a person's head off, dear me!'

The mild Plornish was at first quite unable to get his mind away from Mr F.'s Aunt. 'For,' said he, to excuse himself, 'she is, I do assure you, the winegariest party.'

At length, by a great effort, he detached himself from the subject sufficiently to observe:

'But she's neither here nor there just at present. The other lady, she's Mr Casby's daughter; and if Mr Casby an't well off, none better, it an't through any fault of Pancks. For, as to Pancks, he does, he really does, he does indeed!'

Mr Plornish, after his usual manner, was a little obscure, but conscientiously emphatic.

'And what she come to our place for,' he pursued, 'was to leave word that if

Miss Dorrit would step up to that cardwhich it's Mr Casby's house that is, and Pancks he has a office at the back, where he really does, beyond beliefshe would be glad for to engage her. She was a old and a dear friend, she said particular, of Mr Clennam, and hoped for to prove herself a useful friend to his friend. Them was her words. Wishing to know whether Miss Dorrit could come tomorrow morning, I said I would see you, Miss, and inquire, and look round there tonight, to say yes, or, if you was engaged tomorrow, when?'

'I can go tomorrow, thank you,' said Little Dorrit. 'This is very kind of you, but you are always kind.'

Mr Plornish, with a modest disavowal of his merits, opened the room door for her readmission, and followed her in with such an exceedingly bald pretence of not having been out at all, that her father might have observed it without being very suspicious. In his affable unconsciousness, however, he took no heed. Plornish, after a little conversation, in which he blended his former duty as a Collegian with his present privilege as a humble outside friend, qualified again by his low estate as a plasterer, took his leave; making the tour of the prison before he left, and looking on at a game of skittles with the mixed feelings of an old inhabitant who had his private reasons for believing that it might be his destiny to come back again.

Early in the morning, Little Dorrit, leaving Maggy in high domestic trust, set off for the Patriarchal tent. She went by the Iron Bridge, though it cost her a penny, and walked more slowly in that part of her journey than in any other. At five minutes before eight her hand was on the Patriarchal knocker, which was quite as high as she could reach.

She gave Mrs Finching's card to the young woman who opened the door, and the young woman told her that 'Miss Flora'Flora having, on her return to the parental roof, reinvested herself with the title under which she had lived therewas not yet out of her bedroom, but she was to please to walk up into Miss Flora's sittingroom. She walked up into Miss Flora's sittingroom, as in duty bound, and there found a breakfasttable comfortably laid for two, with a supplementary tray upon it laid for one. The young woman, disappearing for a few moments, returned to say that she was to please to take a chair by the fire, and to take off her bonnet and make herself at home. But Little Dorrit, being bashful, and not used to make herself at home on such occasions, felt at a loss how to do it; so she was still sitting near the door with her bonnet on, when Flora came in in a hurry half an hour afterwards.

Flora was so sorry to have kept her waiting, and good gracious why did she sit out there in the cold when she had expected to find her by the fire reading the paper, and hadn't that heedless girl given her the message then, and had she really been in her bonnet all this time, and pray for goodness sake let Flora

take it off! Flora taking it off in the bestnatured manner in the world, was so struck with the face disclosed, that she said, 'Why, what a good little thing you are, my dear!' and pressed her face between her hands like the gentlest of women.

It was the word and the action of a moment. Little Dorrit had hardly time to think how kind it was, when Flora dashed at the breakfasttable full of business, and plunged over head and ears into loquacity.

'Really so sorry that I should happen to be late on this morning of all mornings because my intention and my wish was to be ready to meet you when you came in and to say that any one that interested Arthur Clennam half so much must interest me and that I gave you the heartiest welcome and was so glad, instead of which they never called me and there I still am snoring I dare say if the truth was known and if you don't like either cold fowl or hot boiled ham which many people don't I dare say besides Jews and theirs are scruples of conscience which we must all respect though I must say I wish they had them equally strong when they sell us false articles for real that certainly ain't worth the money I shall be quite vexed,' said Flora.

Little Dorrit thanked her, and said, shyly, breadandbutter and tea was all she usually

'Oh nonsense my dear child I can never hear of that,' said Flora, turning on the urn in the most reckless manner, and making herself wink by splashing hot water into her eyes as she bent down to look into the teapot. 'You are coming here on the footing of a friend and companion you know if you will let me take that liberty and I should be ashamed of myself indeed if you could come here upon any other, besides which Arthur Clennam spoke in such termsyou are tired my dear.'

'No, ma'am.'

'You turn so pale you have walked too far before breakfast and I dare say live a great way off and ought to have had a ride,' said Flora, 'dear dear is there anything that would do you good?'

'Indeed I am quite well, ma'am. I thank you again and again, but I am quite well.'

'Then take your tea at once I beg,' said Flora, 'and this wing of fowl and bit of ham, don't mind me or wait for me, because I always carry in this tray myself to Mr F.'s Aunt who breakfasts in bed and a charming old lady too and very clever, Portrait of Mr F. behind the door and very like though too much forehead and as to a pillar with a marble pavement and balustrades and a mountain, I never saw him near it nor not likely in the wine trade, excellent

man but not at all in that way.'

Little Dorrit glanced at the portrait, very imperfectly following the references to that work of art.

'Mr F. was so devoted to me that he never could bear me out of his sight,' said Flora, 'though of course I am unable to say how long that might have lasted if he hadn't been cut short while I was a new broom, worthy man but not poetical manly prose but not romance.'

Little Dorrit glanced at the portrait again. The artist had given it a head that would have been, in an intellectual point of view, topheavy for Shakespeare. 'Romance, however,' Flora went on, busily arranging Mr F.'s Aunt's toast, 'as I openly said to Mr F. when he proposed to me and you will be surprised to hear that he proposed seven times once in a hackneycoach once in a boat once in a pew once on a donkey at Tunbridge Wells and the rest on his knees, Romance was fled with the early days of Arthur Clennam, our parents tore us asunder we became marble and stern reality usurped the throne, Mr F. said very much to his credit that he was perfectly aware of it and even preferred that state of things accordingly the word was spoken the fiat went forth and such is life you see my dear and yet we do not break but bend, pray make a good breakfast while I go in with the tray.'

She disappeared, leaving Little Dorrit to ponder over the meaning of her scattered words. She soon came back again; and at last began to take her own breakfast, talking all the while.

'You see, my dear,' said Flora, measuring out a spoonful or two of some brown liquid that smelt like brandy, and putting it into her tea, 'I am obliged to be careful to follow the directions of my medical man though the flavour is anything but agreeable being a poor creature and it may be have never recovered the shock received in youth from too much giving way to crying in the next room when separated from Arthur, have you known him long?'

As soon as Little Dorrit comprehended that she had been asked this questionfor which time was necessary, the galloping pace of her new patroness having left her far behindshe answered that she had known Mr Clennam ever since his return.

'To be sure you couldn't have known him before unless you had been in China or had corresponded neither of which is likely,' returned Flora, 'for travellingpeople usually get more or less mahogany and you are not at all so and as to corresponding what about? that's very true unless tea, so it was at his mother's was it really that you knew him first, highly sensible and firm but dreadfully severeought to be the mother of the man in the iron mask.'

'Mrs Clennam has been kind to me,' said Little Dorrit.

'Really? I am sure I am glad to hear it because as Arthur's mother it's naturally pleasant to my feelings to have a better opinion of her than I had before, though what she thinks of me when I run on as I am certain to do and she sits glowering at me like Fate in a gocartshocking comparison reallyinvalid and not her faultI never know or can imagine.'

'Shall I find my work anywhere, ma'am?' asked Little Dorrit, looking timidly about; 'can I get it?'

'You industrious little fairy,' returned Flora, taking, in another cup of tea, another of the doses prescribed by her medical man, 'there's not the slightest hurry and it's better that we should begin by being confidential about our mutual friendtoo cold a word for me at least I don't mean that, very proper expression mutual friendthan become through mere formalities not you but me like the Spartan boy with the fox biting him, which I hope you'll excuse my bringing up for of all the tiresome boys that will go tumbling into every sort of company that boy's the tiresomest.'

Little Dorrit, her face very pale, sat down again to listen. 'Hadn't I better work the while?' she asked. 'I can work and attend too. I would rather, if I may.'

Her earnestness was so expressive of her being uneasy without her work, that Flora answered, 'Well my dear whatever you like best,' and produced a basket of white handkerchiefs. Little Dorrit gladly put it by her side, took out her little pockethousewife, threaded the needle, and began to hem.

'What nimble fingers you have,' said Flora, 'but are you sure you are well?'

'Oh yes, indeed!'

Flora put her feet upon the fender, and settled herself for a thorough good romantic disclosure. She started off at score, tossing her head, sighing in the most demonstrative manner, making a great deal of use of her eyebrows, and occasionally, but not often, glancing at the quiet face that bent over the work.

'You must know my dear,' said Flora, 'but that I have no doubt you know already not only because I have already thrown it out in a general way but because I feel I carry it stamped in burning what's his names upon my brow that before I was introduced to the late Mr F. I had been engaged to Arthur ClennamMr Clennam in public where reserve is necessary Arthur herewe were all in all to one another it was the morning of life it was bliss it was frenzy it was everything else of that sort in the highest degree, when rent asunder we turned to stone in which capacity Arthur went to China and I became the statue bride of the late Mr F.'

Flora, uttering these words in a deep voice, enjoyed herself immensely.

'To paint,' said she, 'the emotions of that morning when all was marble within and Mr F.'s Aunt followed in a glasscoach which it stands to reason must have been in shameful repair or it never could have broken down two streets from the house and Mr F.'s Aunt brought home like the fifth of November in a rushbottomed chair I will not attempt, suffice it to say that the hollow form of breakfast took place in the diningroom downstairs that papa partaking too freely of pickled salmon was ill for weeks and that Mr F. and myself went upon a continental tour to Calais where the people fought for us on the pier until they separated us though not for ever that was not yet to be.'

The statue bride, hardly pausing for breath, went on, with the greatest complacency, in a rambling manner sometimes incidental to flesh and blood.

'I will draw a veil over that dreamy life, Mr F. was in good spirits his appetite was good he liked the cookery he considered the wine weak but palatable and all was well, we returned to the immediate neighbourhood of Number Thirty Little Gosling Street London Docks and settled down, ere we had yet fully detected the housemaid in selling the feathers out of the spare bed Gout flying upwards soared with Mr F. to another sphere.'

His relict, with a glance at his portrait, shook her head and wiped her eyes.

'I revere the memory of Mr F. as an estimable man and most indulgent husband, only necessary to mention Asparagus and it appeared or to hint at any little delicate thing to drink and it came like magic in a pint bottle it was not ecstasy but it was comfort, I returned to papa's roof and lived secluded if not happy during some years until one day papa came smoothly blundering in and said that Arthur Clennam awaited me below, I went below and found him ask me not what I found him except that he was still unmarried still unchanged!'

The dark mystery with which Flora now enshrouded herself might have stopped other fingers than the nimble fingers that worked near her.

They worked on without pause, and the busy head bent over them watching the stitches.

'Ask me not,' said Flora, 'if I love him still or if he still loves me or what the end is to be or when, we are surrounded by watchful eyes and it may be that we are destined to pine asunder it may be never more to be reunited not a word not a breath not a look to betray us all must be secret as the tomb wonder not therefore that even if I should seem comparatively cold to Arthur or Arthur should seem comparatively cold to me we have fatal reasons it is enough if we understand them hush!'

All of which Flora said with so much headlong vehemence as if she really believed it. There is not much doubt that when she worked herself into full mermaid condition, she did actually believe whatever she said in it.

'Hush!' repeated Flora, 'I have now told you all, confidence is established between us hush, for Arthur's sake I will always be a friend to you my dear girl and in Arthur's name you may always rely upon me.'

The nimble fingers laid aside the work, and the little figure rose and kissed her hand. 'You are very cold,' said Flora, changing to her own natural kindhearted manner, and gaining greatly by the change. 'Don't work today. I am sure you are not well I am sure you are not strong.'

'It is only that I feel a little overcome by your kindness, and by Mr Clennam's kindness in confiding me to one he has known and loved so long.'

'Well really my dear,' said Flora, who had a decided tendency to be always honest when she gave herself time to think about it, 'it's as well to leave that alone now, for I couldn't undertake to say after all, but it doesn't signify lie down a little!'

'I have always been strong enough to do what I want to do, and I shall be quite well directly,' returned Little Dorrit, with a faint smile. 'You have overpowered me with gratitude, that's all. If I keep near the window for a moment I shall be quite myself.'

Flora opened a window, sat her in a chair by it, and considerately retired to her former place. It was a windy day, and the air stirring on Little Dorrit's face soon brightened it. In a very few minutes she returned to her basket of work, and her nimble fingers were as nimble as ever.

Quietly pursuing her task, she asked Flora if Mr Clennam had told her where she lived? When Flora replied in the negative, Little Dorrit said that she understood why he had been so delicate, but that she felt sure he would approve of her confiding her secret to Flora, and that she would therefore do so now with Flora's permission. Receiving an encouraging answer, she condensed the narrative of her life into a few scanty words about herself and a glowing eulogy upon her father; and Flora took it all in with a natural tenderness that quite understood it, and in which there was no incoherence.

When dinnertime came, Flora drew the arm of her new charge through hers, and led her downstairs, and presented her to the Patriarch and Mr Pancks, who were already in the diningroom waiting to begin. (Mr F.'s Aunt was, for the time, laid up in ordinary in her chamber.) By those gentlemen she was received according to their characters; the Patriarch appearing to do her some inestimable service in saying that he was glad to see her, glad to see her; and

Mr Pancks blowing off his favourite sound as a salute.

In that new presence she would have been bashful enough under any circumstances, and particularly under Flora's insisting on her drinking a glass of wine and eating of the best that was there; but her constraint was greatly increased by Mr Pancks. The demeanour of that gentleman at first suggested to her mind that he might be a taker of likenesses, so intently did he look at her, and so frequently did he glance at the little notebook by his side. Observing that he made no sketch, however, and that he talked about business only, she began to have suspicions that he represented some creditor of her father's, the balance due to whom was noted in that pocket volume. Regarded from this point of view Mr Pancks's puffings expressed injury and impatience, and each of his louder snorts became a demand for payment.

But here again she was undeceived by anomalous and incongruous conduct on the part of Mr Pancks himself. She had left the table half an hour, and was at work alone. Flora had 'gone to lie down' in the next room, concurrently with which retirement a smell of something to drink had broken out in the house. The Patriarch was fast asleep, with his philanthropic mouth open under a yellow pockethandkerchief in the diningroom. At this quiet time, Mr Pancks softly appeared before her, urbanely nodding.

'Find it a little dull, Miss Dorrit?' inquired Pancks in a low voice.

'No, thank you, sir,' said Little Dorrit.

'Busy, I see,' observed Mr Pancks, stealing into the room by inches. 'What are those now, Miss Dorrit?'

'Handkerchiefs.'

'Are they, though!' said Pancks. 'I shouldn't have thought it.' Not in the least looking at them, but looking at Little Dorrit. 'Perhaps you wonder who I am. Shall I tell you? I am a fortuneteller.'

Little Dorrit now began to think he was mad.

'I belong body and soul to my proprietor,' said Pancks; 'you saw my proprietor having his dinner below. But I do a little in the other way, sometimes; privately, very privately, Miss Dorrit.'

Little Dorrit looked at him doubtfully, and not without alarm.

'I wish you'd show me the palm of your hand,' said Pancks. 'I should like to have a look at it. Don't let me be troublesome.' He was so far troublesome that he was not at all wanted there, but she laid her work in her lap for a moment, and held out her left hand with her thimble on it.

'Years of toil, eh?' said Pancks, softly, touching it with his blunt forefinger. 'But what else are we made for? Nothing. Hallo!' looking into the lines. 'What's this with bars? It's a College! And what's this with a grey gown and a black velvet cap? it's a father! And what's this with a clarionet? It's an uncle! And what's this in dancingshoes? It's a sister! And what's this straggling about in an idle sort of a way? It's a brother! And what's this thinking for 'em all? Why, this is you, Miss Dorrit!' Her eyes met his as she looked up wonderingly into his face, and she thought that although his were sharp eyes, he was a brighter and gentlerlooking man than she had supposed at dinner. His eyes were on her hand again directly, and her opportunity of confirming or correcting the impression was gone.

'Now, the deuce is in it,' muttered Pancks, tracing out a line in her hand with his clumsy finger, 'if this isn't me in the corner here! What do I want here? What's behind me?'

He carried his finger slowly down to the wrist, and round the wrist, and affected to look at the back of the hand for what was behind him.

'Is it any harm?' asked Little Dorrit, smiling.

'Deuce a bit!' said Pancks. 'What do you think it's worth?'

'I ought to ask you that. I am not the fortuneteller.'

'True,' said Pancks. 'What's it worth? You shall live to see, Miss Dorrit.'

Releasing the hand by slow degrees, he drew all his fingers through his prongs of hair, so that they stood up in their most portentous manner; and repeated slowly, 'Remember what I say, Miss Dorrit. You shall live to see.'

She could not help showing that she was much surprised, if it were only by his knowing so much about her.

'Ah! That's it!' said Pancks, pointing at her. 'Miss Dorrit, not that, ever!'

More surprised than before, and a little more frightened, she looked to him for an explanation of his last words.

'Not that,' said Pancks, making, with great seriousness, an imitation of a surprised look and manner that appeared to be unintentionally grotesque. 'Don't do that. Never on seeing me, no matter when, no matter where. I am nobody. Don't take on to mind me. Don't mention me. Take no notice. Will you agree, Miss Dorrit?'

'I hardly know what to say,' returned Little Dorrit, quite astounded. 'Why?'

'Because I am a fortuneteller. Pancks the gipsy. I haven't told you so much of

your fortune yet, Miss Dorrit, as to tell you what's behind me on that little hand. I have told you you shall live to see. Is it agreed, Miss Dorrit?'

'Agreed that Iamto'

'To take no notice of me away from here, unless I take on first. Not to mind me when I come and go. It's very easy. I am no loss, I am not handsome, I am not good company, I am only my proprietors grubber. You need do no more than think, "Ah! Pancks the gipsy at his fortunetellinghe'll tell the rest of my fortune one dayI shall live to know it." Is it agreed, Miss Dorrit?'

'Yees,' faltered Little Dorrit, whom he greatly confused, 'I suppose so, while you do no harm.'

'Good!' Mr Pancks glanced at the wall of the adjoining room, and stooped forward. 'Honest creature, woman of capital points, but heedless and a loose talker, Miss Dorrit.' With that he rubbed his hands as if the interview had been very satisfactory to him, panted away to the door, and urbanely nodded himself out again.

If Little Dorrit were beyond measure perplexed by this curious conduct on the part of her new acquaintance, and by finding herself involved in this singular treaty, her perplexity was not diminished by ensuing circumstances. Besides that Mr Pancks took every opportunity afforded him in Mr Casby's house of significantly glancing at her and snorting at herwhich was not much, after what he had done alreadyhe began to pervade her daily life. She saw him in the street, constantly. When she went to Mr Casby's, he was always there. When she went to Mrs Clennam's, he came there on any pretence, as if to keep her in his sight. A week had not gone by, when she found him to her astonishment in the Lodge one night, conversing with the turnkey on duty, and to all appearance one of his familiar companions. Her next surprise was to find him equally at his ease within the prison; to hear of his presenting himself among the visitors at her father's Sunday levee; to see him arm in arm with a Collegiate friend about the yard; to learn, from Fame, that he had greatly distinguished himself one evening at the social club that held its meetings in the Snuggery, by addressing a speech to the members of the institution, singing a song, and treating the company to five gallons of alereport madly added a bushel of shrimps. The effect on Mr Plornish of such of these phenomena as he became an eyewitness of in his faithful visits, made an impression on Little Dorrit only second to that produced by the phenomena themselves. They seemed to gag and bind him. He could only stare, and sometimes weakly mutter that it wouldn't be believed down Bleeding Heart Yard that this was Pancks; but he never said a word more, or made a sign more, even to Little Dorrit.

Mr Pancks crowned his mysteries by making himself acquainted with Tip in some unknown manner, and taking a Sunday saunter into the College on that gentleman's arm. Throughout he never took any notice of Little Dorrit, save once or twice when he happened to come close to her and there was no one very near; on which occasions, he said in passing, with a friendly look and a puff of encouragement, 'Pancks the gipsyfortunetelling.'

Little Dorrit worked and strove as usual, wondering at all this, but keeping her wonder, as she had from her earliest years kept many heavier loads, in her own breast. A change had stolen, and was stealing yet, over the patient heart. Every day found her something more retiring than the day before. To pass in and out of the prison unnoticed, and elsewhere to be overlooked and forgotten, were, for herself, her chief desires.

To her own room too, strangely assorted room for her delicate youth and character, she was glad to retreat as often as she could without desertion of any duty. There were afternoon times when she was unemployed, when visitors dropped in to play a hand at cards with her father, when she could be spared and was better away. Then she would flit along the yard, climb the scores of stairs that led to her room, and take her seat at the window. Many combinations did those spikes upon the wall assume, many light shapes did the strong iron weave itself into, many golden touches fell upon the rust, while Little Dorrit sat there musing. New zigzags sprung into the cruel pattern sometimes, when she saw it through a burst of tears; but beautified or hardened still, always over it and under it and through it, she was fain to look in her solitude, seeing everything with that ineffaceable brand.

A garret, and a Marshalsea garret without compromise, was Little Dorrit's room. Beautifully kept, it was ugly in itself, and had little but cleanliness and air to set it off; for what embellishment she had ever been able to buy, had gone to her father's room. Howbeit, for this poor place she showed an increasing love; and to sit in it alone became her favourite rest.

Insomuch, that on a certain afternoon during the Pancks mysteries, when she was seated at her window, and heard Maggy's wellknown step coming up the stairs, she was very much disturbed by the apprehension of being summoned away. As Maggy's step came higher up and nearer, she trembled and faltered; and it was as much as she could do to speak, when Maggy at length appeared.

'Please, Little Mother,' said Maggy, panting for breath, 'you must come down and see him. He's here.'

'Who, Maggy?'

'Who, o' course Mr Clennam. He's in your father's room, and he says to me, Maggy, will you be so kind and go and say it's only me.'

'I am not very well, Maggy. I had better not go. I am going to lie down. See! I lie down now, to ease my head. Say, with my grateful regard, that you left me so, or I would have come.'

'Well, it an't very polite though, Little Mother,' said the staring Maggy, 'to turn your face away, neither!'

Maggy was very susceptible to personal slights, and very ingenious in inventing them. 'Putting both your hands afore your face too!' she went on. 'If you can't bear the looks of a poor thing, it would be better to tell her so at once, and not go and shut her out like that, hurting her feelings and breaking her heart at ten year old, poor thing!'

'It's to ease my head, Maggy.'

'Well, and if you cry to ease your head, Little Mother, let me cry too. Don't go and have all the crying to yourself,' expostulated Maggy, 'that an't not being greedy.' And immediately began to blubber.

It was with some difficulty that she could be induced to go back with the excuse; but the promise of being told a storyof old her great delighton condition that she concentrated her faculties upon the errand and left her little mistress to herself for an hour longer, combined with a misgiving on Maggy's part that she had left her good temper at the bottom of the staircase, prevailed. So away she went, muttering her message all the way to keep it in her mind, and, at the appointed time, came back.

'He was very sorry, I can tell you,' she announced, 'and wanted to send a doctor. And he's coming again tomorrow he is and I don't think he'll have a good sleep tonight along o' hearing about your head, Little Mother. Oh my! Ain't you been acrying!'

'I think I have, a little, Maggy.'

'A little! Oh!'

'But it's all over nowall over for good, Maggy. And my head is much better and cooler, and I am quite comfortable. I am very glad I did not go down.'

Her great staring child tenderly embraced her; and having smoothed her hair, and bathed her forehead and eyes with cold water (offices in which her awkward hands became skilful), hugged her again, exulted in her brighter looks, and stationed her in her chair by the window. Over against this chair, Maggy, with apoplectic exertions that were not at all required, dragged the box which was her seat on storytelling occasions, sat down upon it, hugged her own knees, and said, with a voracious appetite for stories, and with widelyopened eyes:

'Now, Little Mother, let's have a good 'un!'

'What shall it be about, Maggy?'

'Oh, let's have a princess,' said Maggy, 'and let her be a reg'lar one. Beyond all belief, you know!'

Little Dorrit considered for a moment; and with a rather sad smile upon her face, which was flushed by the sunset, began:

'Maggy, there was once upon a time a fine King, and he had everything he could wish for, and a great deal more. He had gold and silver, diamonds and rubies, riches of every kind. He had palaces, and he had'

'Hospitals,' interposed Maggy, still nursing her knees. 'Let him have hospitals, because they're so comfortable. Hospitals with lots of Chicking.'

'Yes, he had plenty of them, and he had plenty of everything.'

'Plenty of baked potatoes, for instance?' said Maggy.

'Plenty of everything.'

'Lor!' chuckled Maggy, giving her knees a hug. 'Wasn't it prime!'

'This King had a daughter, who was the wisest and most beautiful Princess that ever was seen. When she was a child she understood all her lessons before her masters taught them to her; and when she was grown up, she was the wonder of the world. Now, near the Palace where this Princess lived, there was a cottage in which there was a poor little tiny woman, who lived all alone by herself.'

'An old woman,' said Maggy, with an unctuous smack of her lips.

'No, not an old woman. Quite a young one.'

'I wonder she warn't afraid,' said Maggy. 'Go on, please.'

'The Princess passed the cottage nearly every day, and whenever she went by in her beautiful carriage, she saw the poor tiny woman spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her. So, one day she stopped the coachman a little way from the cottage, and got out and walked on and peeped in at the door, and there, as usual, was the tiny woman spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the Princess, and the Princess looked at her.'

'Like trying to stare one another out,' said Maggy. 'Please go on, Little Mother.'

'The Princess was such a wonderful Princess that she had the power of knowing secrets, and she said to the tiny woman, Why do you keep it there?

This showed her directly that the Princess knew why she lived all alone by herself spinning at her wheel, and she kneeled down at the Princess's feet, and asked her never to betray her. So the Princess said, I never will betray you. Let me see it. So the tiny woman closed the shutter of the cottage window and fastened the door, and trembling from head to foot for fear that any one should suspect her, opened a very secret place and showed the Princess a shadow.'

'Lor!' said Maggy. 'It was the shadow of Some one who had gone by long before: of Some one who had gone on far away quite out of reach, never, never to come back. It was bright to look at; and when the tiny woman showed it to the Princess, she was proud of it with all her heart, as a great, great treasure. When the Princess had considered it a little while, she said to the tiny woman, And you keep watch over this every day? And she cast down her eyes, and whispered, Yes. Then the Princess said, Remind me why. To which the other replied, that no one so good and kind had ever passed that way, and that was why in the beginning. She said, too, that nobody missed it, that nobody was the worse for it, that Some one had gone on, to those who were expecting him'

'Some one was a man then?' interposed Maggy.

Little Dorrit timidly said Yes, she believed so; and resumed:

'Had gone on to those who were expecting him, and that this remembrance was stolen or kept back from nobody. The Princess made answer, Ah! But when the cottager died it would be discovered there. The tiny woman told her No; when that time came, it would sink quietly into her own grave, and would never be found.'

'Well, to be sure!' said Maggy. 'Go on, please.'

'The Princess was very much astonished to hear this, as you may suppose, Maggy.' ('And well she might be,' said Maggy.)

'So she resolved to watch the tiny woman, and see what came of it. Every day she drove in her beautiful carriage by the cottagedoor, and there she saw the tiny woman always alone by herself spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her. At last one day the wheel was still, and the tiny woman was not to be seen. When the Princess made inquiries why the wheel had stopped, and where the tiny woman was, she was informed that the wheel had stopped because there was nobody to turn it, the tiny woman being dead.'

('They ought to have took her to the Hospital,' said Maggy, and then she'd have got over it.')

'The Princess, after crying a very little for the loss of the tiny woman, dried her eyes and got out of her carriage at the place where she had stopped it before, and went to the cottage and peeped in at the door. There was nobody to look at her now, and nobody for her to look at, so she went in at once to search for the treasured shadow. But there was no sign of it to be found anywhere; and then she knew that the tiny woman had told her the truth, and that it would never give anybody any trouble, and that it had sunk quietly into her own grave, and that she and it were at rest together.

'That's all, Maggy.'

The sunset flush was so bright on Little Dorrit's face when she came thus to the end of her story, that she interposed her hand to shade it.

'Had she got to be old?' Maggy asked.

'The tiny woman?' 'Ah!'

'I don't know,' said Little Dorrit. 'But it would have been just the same if she had been ever so old.'

'Would it raly!' said Maggy. 'Well, I suppose it would though.' And sat staring and ruminating.

She sat so long with her eyes wide open, that at length Little Dorrit, to entice her from her box, rose and looked out of window. As she glanced down into the yard, she saw Pancks come in and leer up with the corner of his eye as he went by.

'Who's he, Little Mother?' said Maggy. She had joined her at the window and was leaning on her shoulder. 'I see him come in and out often.'

'I have heard him called a fortuneteller,' said Little Dorrit. 'But I doubt if he could tell many people even their past or present fortunes.'

'Couldn't have told the Princess hers?' said Maggy.

Little Dorrit, looking musingly down into the dark valley of the prison, shook her head.

'Nor the tiny woman hers?' said Maggy.

'No,' said Little Dorrit, with the sunset very bright upon her. 'But let us come away from the window.'

CHAPTER 25.

Conspirators and Others

The private residence of Mr Pancks was in Pentonville, where he lodged on the secondfloor of a professional gentleman in an extremely small way, who had an innerdoor within the street door, poised on a spring and starting open with a click like a trap; and who wrote up in the fanlight, RUGG, GENERAL AGENT, ACCOUNTANT, DEBTS RECOVERED.

This scroll, majestic in its severe simplicity, illuminated a little slip of front garden abutting on the thirsty highroad, where a few of the dustiest of leaves hung their dismal heads and led a life of choking. A professor of writing occupied the firstfloor, and enlivened the garden railings with glasscases containing choice examples of what his pupils had been before six lessons and while the whole of his young family shook the table, and what they had become after six lessons when the young family was under restraint. The tenancy of Mr Pancks was limited to one airy bedroom; he covenanting and agreeing with Mr Rugg his landlord, that in consideration of a certain scale of payments accurately defined, and on certain verbal notice duly given, he should be at liberty to elect to share the Sunday breakfast, dinner, tea, or supper, or each or any or all of those repasts or meals of Mr and Miss Rugg (his daughter) in the backparlour.

Miss Rugg was a lady of a little property which she had acquired, together with much distinction in the neighbourhood, by having her heart severely lacerated and her feelings mangled by a middleaged baker resident in the vicinity, against whom she had, by the agency of Mr Rugg, found it necessary to proceed at law to recover damages for a breach of promise of marriage. The baker having been, by the counsel for Miss Rugg, witheringly denounced on that occasion up to the full amount of twenty guineas, at the rate of about eighteenpence an epithet, and having been cast in corresponding damages, still suffered occasional persecution from the youth of Pentonville. But Miss Rugg, environed by the majesty of the law, and having her damages invested in the public securities, was regarded with consideration.

In the society of Mr Rugg, who had a round white visage, as if all his blushes had been drawn out of him long ago, and who had a ragged yellow head like a wornout hearth broom; and in the society of Miss Rugg, who had little nankeen spots, like shirt buttons, all over her face, and whose own yellow tresses were rather scrubby than luxuriant; Mr Pancks had usually dined on Sundays for some few years, and had twice a week, or so, enjoyed an evening collation of bread, Dutch cheese, and porter. Mr Pancks was one of the very few marriageable men for whom Miss Rugg had no terrors, the argument with which he reassured himself being twofold; that is to say, firstly, 'that it

wouldn't do twice,' and secondly, 'that he wasn't worth it.' Fortified within this double armour, Mr Pancks snorted at Miss Rugg on easy terms.

Up to this time, Mr Pancks had transacted little or no business at his quarters in Pentonville, except in the sleeping line; but now that he had become a fortuneteller, he was often closeted after midnight with Mr Rugg in his little frontparlour office, and even after those untimely hours, burnt tallow in his bedroom. Though his duties as his proprietor's grubber were in no wise lessened; and though that service bore no greater resemblance to a bed of roses than was to be discovered in its many thorns; some new branch of industry made a constant demand upon him. When he cast off the Patriarch at night, it was only to take an anonymous craft in tow, and labour away afresh in other waters.

The advance from a personal acquaintance with the elder Mr Chivery to an introduction to his amiable wife and disconsolate son, may have been easy; but easy or not, Mr Pancks soon made it. He nestled in the bosom of the tobacco business within a week or two after his first appearance in the College, and particularly addressed himself to the cultivation of a good understanding with Young John. In this endeavour he so prospered as to lure that pining shepherd forth from the groves, and tempt him to undertake mysterious missions; on which he began to disappear at uncertain intervals for as long a space as two or three days together. The prudent Mrs Chivery, who wondered greatly at this change, would have protested against it as detrimental to the Highland typification on the doorpost but for two forcible reasons; one, that her John was roused to take strong interest in the business which these starts were supposed to advanceand this she held to be good for his drooping spirits; the other, that Mr Pancks confidentially agreed to pay her, for the occupation of her son's time, at the handsome rate of seven and sixpence per day. The proposal originated with himself, and was couched in the pithy terms, 'If your John is weak enough, ma'am, not to take it, that is no reason why you should be, don't you see? So, quite between ourselves, ma'am, business being business, here it is!'

What Mr Chivery thought of these things, or how much or how little he knew about them, was never gathered from himself. It has been already remarked that he was a man of few words; and it may be here observed that he had imbibed a professional habit of locking everything up. He locked himself up as carefully as he locked up the Marshalsea debtors. Even his custom of bolting his meals may have been a part of an uniform whole; but there is no question, that, as to all other purposes, he kept his mouth as he kept the Marshalsea door. He never opened it without occasion. When it was necessary to let anything out, he opened it a little way, held it open just as long as sufficed for the purpose, and locked it again.

Even as he would be sparing of his trouble at the Marshalsea door, and would keep a visitor who wanted to go out, waiting for a few moments if he saw another visitor coming down the yard, so that one turn of the key should suffice for both, similarly he would often reserve a remark if he perceived another on its way to his lips, and would deliver himself of the two together. As to any key to his inner knowledge being to be found in his face, the Marshalsea key was as legible as an index to the individual characters and histories upon which it was turned.

That Mr Pancks should be moved to invite any one to dinner at Pentonville, was an unprecedented fact in his calendar. But he invited Young John to dinner, and even brought him within range of the dangerous (because expensive) fascinations of Miss Rugg. The banquet was appointed for a Sunday, and Miss Rugg with her own hands stuffed a leg of mutton with oysters on the occasion, and sent it to the baker'snot THE baker's but an opposition establishment. Provision of oranges, apples, and nuts was also made. And rum was brought home by Mr Pancks on Saturday night, to gladden the visitor's heart. The store of creature comforts was not the chief part of the visitor's reception. Its special feature was a foregone family confidence and sympathy. When Young John appeared at halfpast one without the ivory hand and waistcoat of golden sprigs, the sun shorn of his beams by disastrous clouds, Mr Pancks presented him to the yellowhaired Ruggs as the young man he had so often mentioned who loved Miss Dorrit. 'I am glad,' said Mr Rugg, challenging him specially in that character, 'to have the distinguished gratification of making your acquaintance, sir. Your feelings do you honour. You are young; may you never outlive your feelings! If I was to outlive my own feelings, sir,' said Mr Rugg, who was a man of many words, and was considered to possess a remarkably good address; 'if I was to outlive my own feelings, I'd leave fifty pound in my will to the man who would put me out of existence.'

Miss Rugg heaved a sigh.

'My daughter, sir,' said Mr Rugg. 'Anastatia, you are no stranger to the state of this young man's affections. My daughter has had her trials, sir'Mr Rugg might have used the word more pointedly in the singular number'and she can feel for you.'

Young John, almost overwhelmed by the touching nature of this greeting, professed himself to that effect.

'What I envy you, sir, is,' said Mr Rugg, 'allow me to take your hatwe are rather short of pegsI'll put it in the corner, nobody will tread on it thereWhat I envy you, sir, is the luxury of your own feelings. I belong to a profession in which that luxury is sometimes denied us.'

Young John replied, with acknowledgments, that he only hoped he did what was right, and what showed how entirely he was devoted to Miss Dorrit. He wished to be unselfish; and he hoped he was. He wished to do anything as laid in his power to serve Miss Dorrit, altogether putting himself out of sight; and he hoped he did. It was but little that he could do, but he hoped he did it.

'Sir,' said Mr Rugg, taking him by the hand, 'you are a young man that it does one good to come across. You are a young man that I should like to put in the witnessbox, to humanise the minds of the legal profession. I hope you have brought your appetite with you, and intend to play a good knife and fork?'

'Thank you, sir,' returned Young John, 'I don't eat much at present.'

Mr Rugg drew him a little apart. 'My daughter's case, sir,' said he, 'at the time when, in vindication of her outraged feelings and her sex, she became the plaintiff in Rugg and Bawkins. I suppose I could have put it in evidence, Mr Chivery, if I had thought it worth my while, that the amount of solid sustenance my daughter consumed at that period did not exceed ten ounces per week.' 'I think I go a little beyond that, sir,' returned the other, hesitating, as if he confessed it with some shame.

'But in your case there's no fiend in human form,' said Mr Rugg, with argumentative smile and action of hand. 'Observe, Mr Chivery!

No fiend in human form!' 'No, sir, certainly,' Young John added with simplicity, 'I should be very sorry if there was.'

'The sentiment,' said Mr Rugg, 'is what I should have expected from your known principles. It would affect my daughter greatly, sir, if she heard it. As I perceive the mutton, I am glad she didn't hear it. Mr Pancks, on this occasion, pray face me. My dear, face Mr Chivery. For what we are going to receive, may we (and Miss Dorrit) be truly thankful!'

But for a grave waggishness in Mr Rugg's manner of delivering this introduction to the feast, it might have appeared that Miss Dorrit was expected to be one of the company. Pancks recognised the sally in his usual way, and took in his provender in his usual way. Miss Rugg, perhaps making up some of her arrears, likewise took very kindly to the mutton, and it rapidly diminished to the bone. A breadandbutter pudding entirely disappeared, and a considerable amount of cheese and radishes vanished by the same means. Then came the dessert.

Then also, and before the broaching of the rum and water, came Mr Pancks's notebook. The ensuing business proceedings were brief but curious, and rather in the nature of a conspiracy. Mr Pancks looked over his notebook, which was now getting full, studiously; and picked out little extracts, which he wrote on

separate slips of paper on the table; Mr Rugg, in the meanwhile, looking at him with close attention, and Young John losing his uncollected eye in mists of meditation. When Mr Pancks, who supported the character of chief conspirator, had completed his extracts, he looked them over, corrected them, put up his notebook, and held them like a hand at cards.

'Now, there's a churchyard in Bedfordshire,' said Pancks. 'Who takes it?'

'I'll take it, sir,' returned Mr Rugg, 'if no one bids.'

Mr Pancks dealt him his card, and looked at his hand again.

'Now, there's an Enquiry in York,' said Pancks. 'Who takes it?'

'I'm not good for York,' said Mr Rugg.

'Then perhaps,' pursued Pancks, 'you'll be so obliging, John Chivery?' Young John assenting, Pancks dealt him his card, and consulted his hand again.

'There's a Church in London; I may as well take that. And a Family Bible; I may as well take that, too. That's two to me. Two to me,' repeated Pancks, breathing hard over his cards. 'Here's a Clerk at Durham for you, John, and an old seafaring gentleman at Dunstable for you, Mr Rugg. Two to me, was it? Yes, two to me. Here's a Stone; three to me. And a Stillborn Baby; four to me. And all, for the present, told.' When he had thus disposed of his cards, all being done very quietly and in a suppressed tone, Mr Pancks puffed his way into his own breastpocket and tugged out a canvas bag; from which, with a sparing hand, he told forth money for travelling expenses in two little portions. 'Cash goes out fast,' he said anxiously, as he pushed a portion to each of his male companions, 'very fast.'

'I can only assure you, Mr Pancks,' said Young John, 'that I deeply regret my circumstances being such that I can't afford to pay my own charges, or that it's not advisable to allow me the time necessary for my doing the distances on foot; because nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to walk myself off my legs without fee or reward.'

This young man's disinterestedness appeared so very ludicrous in the eyes of Miss Rugg, that she was obliged to effect a precipitate retirement from the company, and to sit upon the stairs until she had had her laugh out. Meanwhile Mr Pancks, looking, not without some pity, at Young John, slowly and thoughtfully twisted up his canvas bag as if he were wringing its neck. The lady, returning as he restored it to his pocket, mixed rum and water for the party, not forgetting her fair self, and handed to every one his glass. When all were supplied, Mr Rugg rose, and silently holding out his glass at arm's length above the centre of the table, by that gesture invited the other three to add

theirs, and to unite in a general conspiratorial clink. The ceremony was effective up to a certain point, and would have been wholly so throughout, if Miss Rugg, as she raised her glass to her lips in completion of it, had not happened to look at Young John; when she was again so overcome by the contemptible comicality of his disinterestedness as to splutter some ambrosial drops of rum and water around, and withdraw in confusion.

Such was the dinner without precedent, given by Pancks at Pentonville; and such was the busy and strange life Pancks led. The only waking moments at which he appeared to relax from his cares, and to recreate himself by going anywhere or saying anything without a pervading object, were when he showed a dawning interest in the lame foreigner with the stick, down Bleeding Heart Yard.

The foreigner, by name John Baptist Cavallettothey called him Mr Baptist in the Yardwas such a chirping, easy, hopeful little fellow, that his attraction for Pancks was probably in the force of contrast. Solitary, weak, and scantily acquainted with the most necessary words of the only language in which he could communicate with the people about him, he went with the stream of his fortunes, in a brisk way that was new in those parts. With little to eat, and less to drink, and nothing to wear but what he wore upon him, or had brought tied up in one of the smallest bundles that ever were seen, he put as bright a face upon it as if he were in the most flourishing circumstances when he first hobbled up and down the Yard, humbly propitiating the general goodwill with his white teeth.

It was uphill work for a foreigner, lame or sound, to make his way with the Bleeding Hearts. In the first place, they were vaguely persuaded that every foreigner had a knife about him; in the second, they held it to be a sound constitutional national axiom that he ought to go home to his own country. They never thought of inquiring how many of their own countrymen would be returned upon their hands from divers parts of the world, if the principle were generally recognised; they considered it particularly and peculiarly British. In the third place, they had a notion that it was a sort of Divine visitation upon a foreigner that he was not an Englishman, and that all kinds of calamities happened to his country because it did things that England did not, and did not do things that England did. In this belief, to be sure, they had long been carefully trained by the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings, who were always proclaiming to them, officially, that no country which failed to submit itself to those two large families could possibly hope to be under the protection of Providence; and who, when they believed it, disparaged them in private as the most prejudiced people under the sun.

This, therefore, might be called a political position of the Bleeding Hearts; but

they entertained other objections to having foreigners in the Yard. They believed that foreigners were always badly off; and though they were as ill off themselves as they could desire to be, that did not diminish the force of the objection. They believed that foreigners were dragooned and bayoneted; and though they certainly got their own skulls promptly fractured if they showed any illhumour, still it was with a blunt instrument, and that didn't count. They believed that foreigners were always immoral; and though they had an occasional assize at home, and now and then a divorce case or so, that had nothing to do with it. They believed that foreigners had no independent spirit, as never being escorted to the poll in droves by Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, with colours flying and the tune of Rule Britannia playing. Not to be tedious, they had many other beliefs of a similar kind.

Against these obstacles, the lame foreigner with the stick had to make head as well as he could; not absolutely singlehanded, because Mr Arthur Clennam had recommended him to the Plornishes (he lived at the top of the same house), but still at heavy odds. However, the Bleeding Hearts were kind hearts; and when they saw the little fellow cheerily limping about with a goodhumoured face, doing no harm, drawing no knives, committing no outrageous immoralities, living chiefly on farinaceous and milk diet, and playing with Mrs Plornish's children of an evening, they began to think that although he could never hope to be an Englishman, still it would be hard to visit that affliction on his head. They began to accommodate themselves to his level, calling him 'Mr Baptist,' but treating him like a baby, and laughing immoderately at his lively gestures and his childish Englishmore, because he didn't mind it, and laughed too. They spoke to him in very loud voices as if he were stone deaf. They constructed sentences, by way of teaching him the language in its purity, such as were addressed by the savages to Captain Cook, or by Friday to Robinson Crusoe. Mrs Plornish was particularly ingenious in this art; and attained so much celebrity for saying 'Me ope you leg well soon,' that it was considered in the Yard but a very short remove indeed from speaking Italian. Even Mrs Plornish herself began to think that she had a natural call towards that language. As he became more popular, household objects were brought into requisition for his instruction in a copious vocabulary; and whenever he appeared in the Yard ladies would fly out at their doors crying 'Mr Baptistteapot!' 'Mr Baptistdustpan!' 'Mr Baptistflourdredger!' 'Mr Baptistcoffeebiggin!' At the same time exhibiting those articles, and penetrating him with a sense of the appalling difficulties of the AngloSaxon tongue.

It was in this stage of his progress, and in about the third week of his occupation, that Mr Pancks's fancy became attracted by the little man. Mounting to his attic, attended by Mrs Plornish as interpreter, he found Mr

Baptist with no furniture but his bed on the ground, a table, and a chair, carving with the aid of a few simple tools, in the blithest way possible.

'Now, old chap,' said Mr Pancks, 'pay up!'

He had his money ready, folded in a scrap of paper, and laughingly handed it in; then with a free action, threw out as many fingers of his right hand as there were shillings, and made a cut crosswise in the air for an odd sixpence.

'Oh!' said Mr Pancks, watching him, wonderingly. 'That's it, is it? You're a quick customer. It's all right. I didn't expect to receive it, though.'

Mrs Plornish here interposed with great condescension, and explained to Mr Baptist. 'E please. E glad get money.'

The little man smiled and nodded. His bright face seemed uncommonly attractive to Mr Pancks. 'How's he getting on in his limb?' he asked Mrs Plornish.

'Oh, he's a deal better, sir,' said Mrs Plornish. 'We expect next week he'll be able to leave off his stick entirely.' (The opportunity being too favourable to be lost, Mrs Plornish displayed her great accomplishment by explaining with pardonable pride to Mr Baptist, 'E ope you leg well soon.')

'He's a merry fellow, too,' said Mr Pancks, admiring him as if he were a mechanical toy. 'How does he live?'

'Why, sir,' rejoined Mrs Plornish, 'he turns out to have quite a power of carving them flowers that you see him at now.' (Mr Baptist, watching their faces as they spoke, held up his work. Mrs Plornish interpreted in her Italian manner, on behalf of Mr Pancks, 'E please. Double good!')

'Can he live by that?' asked Mr Pancks. 'He can live on very little, sir, and it is expected as he will be able, in time, to make a very good living. Mr Clennam got it him to do, and gives him odd jobs besides in at the Works next doormakes 'em for him, in short, when he knows he wants 'em.'

'And what does he do with himself, now, when he ain't hard at it?' said Mr Pancks.

'Why, not much as yet, sir, on accounts I suppose of not being able to walk much; but he goes about the Yard, and he chats without particular understanding or being understood, and he plays with the children, and he sits in the sunhe'll sit down anywhere, as if it was an armchairand he'll sing, and he'll laugh!'

'Laugh!' echoed Mr Pancks. 'He looks to me as if every tooth in his head was always laughing.'

'But whenever he gets to the top of the steps at t'other end of the Yard,' said Mrs Plornish, 'he'll peep out in the curiousest way! So that some of us thinks he's peeping out towards where his own country is, and some of us thinks he's looking for somebody he don't want to see, and some of us don't know what to think.'

Mr Baptist seemed to have a general understanding of what she said; or perhaps his quickness caught and applied her slight action of peeping. In any case he closed his eyes and tossed his head with the air of a man who had sufficient reasons for what he did, and said in his own tongue, it didn't matter. Altro!

'What's Altro?' said Pancks.

'Hem! It's a sort of a general kind of expression, sir,' said Mrs Plornish.

'Is it?' said Pancks. 'Why, then Altro to you, old chap. Good afternoon. Altro!'

Mr Baptist in his vivacious way repeating the word several times, Mr Pancks in his duller way gave it him back once. From that time it became a frequent custom with Pancks the gipsy, as he went home jaded at night, to pass round by Bleeding Heart Yard, go quietly up the stairs, look in at Mr Baptist's door, and, finding him in his room, to say, 'Hallo, old chap! Altro!' To which Mr Baptist would reply with innumerable bright nods and smiles, 'Altro, signore, altro, altro, altro!' After this highly condensed conversation, Mr Pancks would go his way with an appearance of being lightened and refreshed.

CHAPTER 26.

Nobody's State of Mind

If Arthur Clennam had not arrived at that wise decision firmly to restrain himself from loving Pet, he would have lived on in a state of much perplexity, involving difficult struggles with his own heart. Not the least of these would have been a contention, always waging within it, between a tendency to dislike Mr Henry Gowan, if not to regard him with positive repugnance, and a whisper that the inclination was unworthy. A generous nature is not prone to strong aversions, and is slow to admit them even dispassionately; but when it finds illwill gaining upon it, and can discern betweenwhiles that its origin is not dispassionate, such a nature becomes distressed.

Therefore Mr Henry Gowan would have clouded Clennam's mind, and would have been far oftener present to it than more agreeable persons and subjects

but for the great prudence of his decision aforesaid. As it was, Mr Gowan seemed transferred to Daniel Doyce's mind; at all events, it so happened that it usually fell to Mr Doyce's turn, rather than to Clennam's, to speak of him in the friendly conversations they held together. These were of frequent occurrence now; as the two partners shared a portion of a roomy house in one of the grave oldfashioned City streets, lying not far from the Bank of England, by London Wall.

Mr Doyce had been to Twickenham to pass the day. Clennam had excused himself. Mr Doyce was just come home. He put in his head at the door of Clennam's sittingroom to say Good night.

'Come in, come in!' said Clennam.

'I saw you were reading,' returned Doyce, as he entered, 'and thought you might not care to be disturbed.'

But for the notable resolution he had made, Clennam really might not have known what he had been reading; really might not have had his eyes upon the book for an hour past, though it lay open before him. He shut it up, rather quickly.

'Are they well?' he asked.

'Yes,' said Doyce; 'they are well. They are all well.'

Daniel had an old workmanlike habit of carrying his pockethandkerchief in his hat. He took it out and wiped his forehead with it, slowly repeating, 'They are all well. Miss Minnie looking particularly well, I thought.'

'Any company at the cottage?'

'No, no company.' 'And how did you get on, you four?' asked Clennam gaily.

'There were five of us,' returned his partner. 'There was What'shisname. He was there.' 'Who is he?' said Clennam.

'Mr Henry Gowan.'

'Ah, to be sure!' cried Clennam with unusual vivacity, 'Yes!I forgot him.'

'As I mentioned, you may remember,' said Daniel Doyce, 'he is always there on Sunday.'

'Yes, yes,' returned Clennam; 'I remember now.'

Daniel Doyce, still wiping his forehead, ploddingly repeated. 'Yes. He was there, he was there. Oh yes, he was there. And his dog. He was there too.'

'Miss Meagles is quite attached tothedog,' observed Clennam.

'Quite so,' assented his partner. 'More attached to the dog than I am to the man.'

'You mean Mr?'

'I mean Mr Gowan, most decidedly,' said Daniel Doyce.

There was a gap in the conversation, which Clennam devoted to winding up his watch.

'Perhaps you are a little hasty in your judgment,' he said. 'Our judgmentsI am supposing a general case'

'Of course,' said Doyce.

'Are so liable to be influenced by many considerations, which, almost without our knowing it, are unfair, that it is necessary to keep a guard upon them. For instance, Mr'

'Gowan,' quietly said Doyce, upon whom the utterance of the name almost always devolved.

'Is young and handsome, easy and quick, has talent, and has seen a good deal of various kinds of life. It might be difficult to give an unselfish reason for being prepossessed against him.'

'Not difficult for me, I think, Clennam,' returned his partner. 'I see him bringing present anxiety, and, I fear, future sorrow, into my old friend's house. I see him wearing deeper lines into my old friend's face, the nearer he draws to, and the oftener he looks at, the face of his daughter. In short, I see him with a net about the pretty and affectionate creature whom he will never make happy.' 'We don't know,' said Clennam, almost in the tone of a man in pain, 'that he will not make her happy.'

'We don't know,' returned his partner, 'that the earth will last another hundred years, but we think it highly probable.'

'Well, well!' said Clennam, 'we must be hopeful, and we must at least try to be, if not generous (which, in this case, we have no opportunity of being), just. We will not disparage this gentleman, because he is successful in his addresses to the beautiful object of his ambition; and we will not question her natural right to bestow her love on one whom she finds worthy of it.'

'Maybe, my friend,' said Doyce. 'Maybe also, that she is too young and petted, too confiding and inexperienced, to discriminate well.'

'That,' said Clennam, 'would be far beyond our power of correction.'

Daniel Doyce shook his head gravely, and rejoined, 'I fear so.'

'Therefore, in a word,' said Clennam, 'we should make up our minds that it is not worthy of us to say any ill of Mr Gowan. It would be a poor thing to gratify a prejudice against him. And I resolve, for my part, not to depreciate him.'

'I am not quite so sure of myself, and therefore I reserve my privilege of objecting to him,' returned the other. 'But, if I am not sure of myself, I am sure of you, Clennam, and I know what an upright man you are, and how much to be respected. Good night, MY friend and partner!' He shook his hand in saying this, as if there had been something serious at the bottom of their conversation; and they separated.

By this time they had visited the family on several occasions, and had always observed that even a passing allusion to Mr Henry Gowan when he was not among them, brought back the cloud which had obscured Mr Meagles's sunshine on the morning of the chance encounter at the Ferry. If Clennam had ever admitted the forbidden passion into his breast, this period might have been a period of real trial; under the actual circumstances, doubtless it was nothingnothing.

Equally, if his heart had given entertainment to that prohibited guest, his silent fighting of his way through the mental condition of this period might have been a little meritorious. In the constant effort not to be betrayed into a new phase of the besetting sin of his experience, the pursuit of selfish objects by low and small means, and to hold instead to some high principle of honour and generosity, there might have been a little merit. In the resolution not even to avoid Mr Meagles's house, lest, in the selfish sparing of himself, he should bring any slight distress upon the daughter through making her the cause of an estrangement which he believed the father would regret, there might have been a little merit. In the modest truthfulness of always keeping in view the greater equality of Mr Gowan's years and the greater attractions of his person and manner, there might have been a little merit. In doing all this and much more, in a perfectly unaffected way and with a manful and composed constancy, while the pain within him (peculiar as his life and history) was very sharp, there might have been some quiet strength of character. But, after the resolution he had made, of course he could have no such merits as these; and such a state of mind was nobody'snobody's.

Mr Gowan made it no concern of his whether it was nobody's or somebody's. He preserved his perfect serenity of manner on all occasions, as if the possibility of Clennam's presuming to have debated the great question were too distant and ridiculous to be imagined. He had always an affability to bestow on Clennam and an ease to treat him with, which might of itself (in the supposititious case of his not having taken that sagacious course) have been a

very uncomfortable element in his state of mind.

'I quite regret you were not with us yesterday,' said Mr Henry Gowan, calling on Clennam the next morning. 'We had an agreeable day up the river there.'

So he had heard, Arthur said.

'From your partner?' returned Henry Gowan. 'What a dear old fellow he is!'

'I have a great regard for him.'

'By Jove, he is the finest creature!' said Gowan. 'So fresh, so green, trusts in such wonderful things!'

Here was one of the many little rough points that had a tendency to grate on Clennam's hearing. He put it aside by merely repeating that he had a high regard for Mr Doyce.

'He is charming! To see him mooning along to that time of life, laying down nothing by the way and picking up nothing by the way, is delightful. It warms a man. So unspoilt, so simple, such a good soul! Upon my life Mr Clennam, one feels desperately worldly and wicked in comparison with such an innocent creature. I speak for myself, let me add, without including you. You are genuine also.'

'Thank you for the compliment,' said Clennam, ill at ease; 'you are too, I hope?'

'So so,' rejoined the other. 'To be candid with you, tolerably. I am not a great impostor. Buy one of my pictures, and I assure you, in confidence, it will not be worth the money. Buy one of another man'sany great professor who beats me hollowand the chances are that the more you give him, the more he'll impose upon you. They all do it.' 'All painters?'

'Painters, writers, patriots, all the rest who have stands in the market. Give almost any man I know ten pounds, and he will impose upon you to a corresponding extent; a thousand poundsto a corresponding extent; ten thousand poundsto a corresponding extent. So great the success, so great the imposition. But what a capital world it is!' cried Gowan with warm enthusiasm. 'What a jolly, excellent, lovable world it is!'

'I had rather thought,' said Clennam, 'that the principle you mention was chiefly acted on by'

'By the Barnacles?' interrupted Gowan, laughing.

'By the political gentlemen who condescend to keep the Circumlocution Office.'

'Ah! Don't be hard upon the Barnacles,' said Gowan, laughing afresh, 'they are darling fellows! Even poor little Clarence, the born idiot of the family, is the most agreeable and most endearing blockhead! And by Jupiter, with a kind of cleverness in him too that would astonish you!'

'It would. Very much,' said Clennam, drily.

'And after all,' cried Gowan, with that characteristic balancing of his which reduced everything in the wide world to the same light weight, 'though I can't deny that the Circumlocution Office may ultimately shipwreck everybody and everything, still, that will probably not be in our timeand it's a school for gentlemen.'

'It's a very dangerous, unsatisfactory, and expensive school to the people who pay to keep the pupils there, I am afraid,' said Clennam, shaking his head.

'Ah! You are a terrible fellow,' returned Gowan, airily. 'I can understand how you have frightened that little donkey, Clarence, the most estimable of mooncalves (I really love him) nearly out of his wits. But enough of him, and of all the rest of them. I want to present you to my mother, Mr Clennam. Pray do me the favour to give me the opportunity.'

In nobody's state of mind, there was nothing Clennam would have desired less, or would have been more at a loss how to avoid.

'My mother lives in a most primitive manner down in that dreary redbrick dungeon at Hampton Court,' said Gowan. 'If you would make your own appointment, suggest your own day for permitting me to take you there to dinner, you would be bored and she would be charmed. Really that's the state of the case.'

What could Clennam say after this? His retiring character included a great deal that was simple in the best sense, because unpractised and unused; and in his simplicity and modesty, he could only say that he was happy to place himself at Mr Gowan's disposal. Accordingly he said it, and the day was fixed. And a dreaded day it was on his part, and a very unwelcome day when it came and they went down to Hampton Court together.

The venerable inhabitants of that venerable pile seemed, in those times, to be encamped there like a sort of civilised gipsies. There was a temporary air about their establishments, as if they were going away the moment they could get anything better; there was also a dissatisfied air about themselves, as if they took it very ill that they had not already got something much better. Genteel blinds and makeshifts were more or less observable as soon as their doors were opened; screens not half high enough, which made diningrooms out of arched passages, and warded off obscure corners where footboys slept

at nights with their heads among the knives and forks; curtains which called upon you to believe that they didn't hide anything; panes of glass which requested you not to see them; many objects of various forms, feigning to have no connection with their guilty secret, a bed; disguised traps in walls, which were clearly coalcellars; affectations of no thoroughfares, which were evidently doors to little kitchens. Mental reservations and artful mysteries grew out of these things. Callers looking steadily into the eyes of their receivers, pretended not to smell cooking three feet off; people, confronting closets accidentally left open, pretended not to see bottles; visitors with their heads against a partition of thin canvas, and a page and a young female at high words on the other side, made believe to be sitting in a primeval silence. There was no end to the small social accommodationbills of this nature which the gipsies of gentility were constantly drawing upon, and accepting for, one another.

Some of these Bohemians were of an irritable temperament, as constantly soured and vexed by two mental trials: the first, the consciousness that they had never got enough out of the public; the second, the consciousness that the public were admitted into the building. Under the latter great wrong, a few suffered dreadfullyparticularly on Sundays, when they had for some time expected the earth to open and swallow the public up; but which desirable event had not yet occurred, in consequence of some reprehensible laxity in the arrangements of the Universe.

Mrs Gowan's door was attended by a family servant of several years' standing, who had his own crow to pluck with the public concerning a situation in the PostOffice which he had been for some time expecting, and to which he was not yet appointed. He perfectly knew that the public could never have got him in, but he grimly gratified himself with the idea that the public kept him out. Under the influence of this injury (and perhaps of some little straitness and irregularity in the matter of wages), he had grown neglectful of his person and morose in mind; and now beholding in Clennam one of the degraded body of his oppressors, received him with ignominy. Mrs Gowan, however, received him with condescension. He found her a courtly old lady, formerly a Beauty, and still sufficiently wellfavoured to have dispensed with the powder on her nose and a certain impossible bloom under each eye. She was a little lofty with him; so was another old lady, darkbrowed and highnosed, and who must have had something real about her or she could not have existed, but it was certainly not her hair or her teeth or her figure or her complexion; so was a grey old gentleman of dignified and sullen appearance; both of whom had come to dinner. But, as they had all been in the British Embassy way in sundry parts of the earth, and as a British Embassy cannot better establish a character with the Circumlocution Office than by treating its compatriots with

illimitable contempt (else it would become like the Embassies of other countries), Clennam felt that on the whole they let him off lightly.

The dignified old gentleman turned out to be Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking, who had been maintained by the Circumlocution Office for many years as a representative of the Britannic Majesty abroad.

This noble Refrigerator had iced several European courts in his time, and had done it with such complete success that the very name of Englishman yet struck cold to the stomachs of foreigners who had the distinguished honour of remembering him at a distance of a quarter of a century.

He was now in retirement, and hence (in a ponderous white cravat, like a stiff snowdrift) was so obliging as to shade the dinner. There was a whisper of the pervading Bohemian character in the nomadic nature of the service and its curious races of plates and dishes; but the noble Refrigerator, infinitely better than plate or porcelain, made it superb. He shaded the dinner, cooled the wines, chilled the gravy, and blighted the vegetables.

There was only one other person in the room: a microscopically small footboy, who waited on the malevolent man who hadn't got into the PostOffice. Even this youth, if his jacket could have been unbuttoned and his heart laid bare, would have been seen, as a distant adherent of the Barnacle family, already to aspire to a situation under Government.

Mrs Gowan with a gentle melancholy upon her, occasioned by her son's being reduced to court the swinish public as a follower of the low Arts, instead of asserting his birthright and putting a ring through its nose as an acknowledged Barnacle, headed the conversation at dinner on the evil days. It was then that Clennam learned for the first time what little pivots this great world goes round upon.

'If John Barnacle,' said Mrs Gowan, after the degeneracy of the times had been fully ascertained, 'if John Barnacle had but abandoned his most unfortunate idea of conciliating the mob, all would have been well, and I think the country would have been preserved.' The old lady with the high nose assented; but added that if Augustus Stiltstalking had in a general way ordered the cavalry out with instructions to charge, she thought the country would have been preserved.

The noble Refrigerator assented; but added that if William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, when they came over to one another and formed their evermemorable coalition, had boldly muzzled the newspapers, and rendered it penal for any Editorperson to presume to discuss the conduct of any appointed authority abroad or at home, he thought the country would have been preserved.

It was agreed that the country (another word for the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings) wanted preserving, but how it came to want preserving was not so clear. It was only clear that the question was all about John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, because there was nobody else but mob. And this was the feature of the conversation which impressed Clennam, as a man not used to it, very disagreeably: making him doubt if it were quite right to sit there, silently hearing a great nation narrowed to such little bounds. Remembering, however, that in the Parliamentary debates, whether on the life of that nation's body or the life of its soul, the question was usually all about and between John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, and nobody else; he said nothing on the part of mob, bethinking himself that mob was used to it.

Mr Henry Gowan seemed to have a malicious pleasure in playing off the three talkers against each other, and in seeing Clennam startled by what they said. Having as supreme a contempt for the class that had thrown him off as for the class that had not taken him on, he had no personal disquiet in anything that passed. His healthy state of mind appeared even to derive a gratification from Clennam's position of embarrassment and isolation among the good company; and if Clennam had been in that condition with which Nobody was incessantly contending, he would have suspected it, and would have struggled with the suspicion as a meanness, even while he sat at the table.

In the course of a couple of hours the noble Refrigerator, at no time less than a hundred years behind the period, got about five centuries in arrears, and delivered solemn political oracles appropriate to that epoch. He finished by freezing a cup of tea for his own drinking, and retiring at his lowest temperature. Then Mrs Gowan, who had been accustomed in her days of a vacant armchair beside her to which to summon state to retain her devoted slaves, one by one, for short audiences as marks of her especial favour, invited Clennam with a turn of her fan to approach the presence. He obeyed, and took the tripod recently vacated by Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking.

'Mr Clennam,' said Mrs Gowan, 'apart from the happiness I have in becoming known to you, though in this odiously inconvenient placea mere barrackthere is a subject on which I am dying to speak to you. It is the subject in connection with which my son first had, I believe, the pleasure of cultivating your acquaintance.'

Clennam inclined his head, as a generally suitable reply to what he did not yet quite understand.

'First,' said Mrs Gowan, 'now, is she really pretty?'

In nobody's difficulties, he would have found it very difficult to answer; very difficult indeed to smile, and say 'Who?'

'Oh! You know!' she returned. 'This flame of Henry's. This unfortunate fancy. There! If it is a point of honour that I should originate the nameMiss MicklesMiggles.'

'Miss Meagles,' said Clennam, 'is very beautiful.'

'Men are so often mistaken on those points,' returned Mrs Gowan, shaking her head, 'that I candidly confess to you I feel anything but sure of it, even now; though it is something to have Henry corroborated with so much gravity and emphasis. He picked the people up at Rome, I think?'

The phrase would have given nobody mortal offence. Clennam replied, 'Excuse me, I doubt if I understand your expression.'

'Picked the people up,' said Mrs Gowan, tapping the sticks of her closed fan (a large green one, which she used as a handscreen) on her little table. 'Came upon them. Found them out. Stumbled UP against them.'

'The people?'

'Yes. The Miggles people.'

'I really cannot say,' said Clennam, 'where my friend Mr Meagles first presented Mr Henry Gowan to his daughter.'

'I am pretty sure he picked her up at Rome; but never mind wheresomewhere. Now (this is entirely between ourselves), is she very plebeian?'

'Really, ma'am,' returned Clennam, 'I am so undoubtedly plebeian myself, that I do not feel qualified to judge.'

'Very neat!' said Mrs Gowan, coolly unfurling her screen. 'Very happy! From which I infer that you secretly think her manner equal to her looks?'

Clennam, after a moment's stiffness, bowed.

'That's comforting, and I hope you may be right. Did Henry tell me you had travelled with them?' 'I travelled with my friend Mr Meagles, and his wife and daughter, during some months.' (Nobody's heart might have been wrung by the remembrance.)

'Really comforting, because you must have had a large experience of them. You see, Mr Clennam, this thing has been going on for a long time, and I find no improvement in it. Therefore to have the opportunity of speaking to one so well informed about it as yourself, is an immense relief to me. Quite a boon. Quite a blessing, I am sure.'

'Pardon me,' returned Clennam, 'but I am not in Mr Henry Gowan's confidence. I am far from being so well informed as you suppose me to be. Your mistake makes my position a very delicate one. No word on this topic has ever passed between Mr Henry Gowan and myself.'

Mrs Gowan glanced at the other end of the room, where her son was playing ecarte on a sofa, with the old lady who was for a charge of cavalry.

'Not in his confidence? No,' said Mrs Gowan. 'No word has passed between you? No. That I can imagine. But there are unexpressed confidences, Mr Clennam; and as you have been together intimately among these people, I cannot doubt that a confidence of that sort exists in the present case. Perhaps you have heard that I have suffered the keenest distress of mind from Henry's having taken to a pursuit whichwell!' shrugging her shoulders, 'a very respectable pursuit, I dare say, and some artists are, as artists, quite superior persons; still, we never yet in our family have gone beyond an Amateur, and it is a pardonable weakness to feel a little'

As Mrs Gowan broke off to heave a sigh, Clennam, however resolute to be magnanimous, could not keep down the thought that there was mighty little danger of the family's ever going beyond an Amateur, even as it was.

'Henry,' the mother resumed, 'is selfwilled and resolute; and as these people naturally strain every nerve to catch him, I can entertain very little hope, Mr Clennam, that the thing will be broken off. I apprehend the girl's fortune will be very small; Henry might have done much better; there is scarcely anything to compensate for the connection: still, he acts for himself; and if I find no improvement within a short time, I see no other course than to resign myself and make the best of these people. I am infinitely obliged to you for what you have told me.' As she shrugged her shoulders, Clennam stiffly bowed again. With an uneasy flush upon his face, and hesitation in his manner, he then said in a still lower tone than he had adopted yet:

'Mrs Gowan, I scarcely know how to acquit myself of what I feel to be a duty, and yet I must ask you for your kind consideration in attempting to discharge it. A misconception on your part, a very great misconception if I may venture to call it so, seems to require setting right. You have supposed Mr Meagles and his family to strain every nerve, I think you said'

'Every nerve,' repeated Mrs Gowan, looking at him in calm obstinacy, with her green fan between her face and the fire.

'To secure Mr Henry Gowan?'

The lady placidly assented.

'Now that is so far,' said Arthur, 'from being the case, that I know Mr Meagles to be unhappy in this matter; and to have interposed all reasonable obstacles with the hope of putting an end to it.'

Mrs Gowan shut up her great green fan, tapped him on the arm with it, and tapped her smiling lips. 'Why, of course,' said she. 'Just what I mean.'

Arthur watched her face for some explanation of what she did mean.

'Are you really serious, Mr Clennam? Don't you see?'

Arthur did not see; and said so.

'Why, don't I know my son, and don't I know that this is exactly the way to hold him?' said Mrs Gowan, contemptuously; 'and do not these Miggles people know it, at least as well as I? Oh, shrewd people, Mr Clennam: evidently people of business! I believe Miggles belonged to a Bank. It ought to have been a very profitable Bank, if he had much to do with its management. This is very well done, indeed.'

'I beg and entreat you, ma'am' Arthur interposed.

'Oh, Mr Clennam, can you really be so credulous?'

It made such a painful impression upon him to hear her talking in this haughty tone, and to see her patting her contemptuous lips with her fan, that he said very earnestly, 'Believe me, ma'am, this is unjust, a perfectly groundless suspicion.'

'Suspicion?' repeated Mrs Gowan. 'Not suspicion, Mr Clennam, Certainty. It is very knowingly done indeed, and seems to have taken YOU in completely.' She laughed; and again sat tapping her lips with her fan, and tossing her head, as if she added, 'Don't tell me. I know such people will do anything for the honour of such an alliance.'

At this opportune moment, the cards were thrown up, and Mr Henry Gowan came across the room saying, 'Mother, if you can spare Mr Clennam for this time, we have a long way to go, and it's getting late.' Mr Clennam thereupon rose, as he had no choice but to do; and Mrs Gowan showed him, to the last, the same look and the same tapped contemptuous lips.

'You have had a portentously long audience of my mother,' said Gowan, as the door closed upon them. 'I fervently hope she has not bored you?'

'Not at all,' said Clennam.

They had a little open phaeton for the journey, and were soon in it on the road home. Gowan, driving, lighted a cigar; Clennam declined one. Do what he

would, he fell into such a mood of abstraction that Gowan said again, 'I am very much afraid my mother has bored you?' To which he roused himself to answer, 'Not at all!' and soon relapsed again.

In that state of mind which rendered nobody uneasy, his thoughtfulness would have turned principally on the man at his side. He would have thought of the morning when he first saw him rooting out the stones with his heel, and would have asked himself, 'Does he jerk me out of the path in the same careless, cruel way?' He would have thought, had this introduction to his mother been brought about by him because he knew what she would say, and that he could thus place his position before a rival and loftily warn him off, without himself reposing a word of confidence in him? He would have thought, even if there were no such design as that, had he brought him there to play with his repressed emotions, and torment him? The current of these meditations would have been stayed sometimes by a rush of shame, bearing a remonstrance to himself from his own open nature, representing that to shelter such suspicions, even for the passing moment, was not to hold the high, unenvious course he had resolved to keep. At those times, the striving within him would have been hardest; and looking up and catching Gowan's eyes, he would have started as if he had done him an injury.

Then, looking at the dark road and its uncertain objects, he would have gradually trailed off again into thinking, 'Where are we driving, he and I, I wonder, on the darker road of life? How will it be with us, and with her, in the obscure distance?' Thinking of her, he would have been troubled anew with a reproachful misgiving that it was not even loyal to her to dislike him, and that in being so easily prejudiced against him he was less deserving of her than at first.

'You are evidently out of spirits,' said Gowan; 'I am very much afraid my mother must have bored you dreadfully.' 'Believe me, not at all,' said Clennam. 'It's nothingnothing!'

CHAPTER 27.

FiveandTwenty

A frequently recurring doubt, whether Mr Pancks's desire to collect information relative to the Dorrit family could have any possible bearing on the misgivings he had imparted to his mother on his return from his long exile, caused Arthur Clennam much uneasiness at this period. What Mr Pancks

already knew about the Dorrit family, what more he really wanted to find out, and why he should trouble his busy head about them at all, were questions that often perplexed him. Mr Pancks was not a man to waste his time and trouble in researches prompted by idle curiosity. That he had a specific object Clennam could not doubt. And whether the attainment of that object by Mr Pancks's industry might bring to light, in some untimely way, secret reasons which had induced his mother to take Little Dorrit by the hand, was a serious speculation.

Not that he ever wavered either in his desire or his determination to repair a wrong that had been done in his father's time, should a wrong come to light, and be reparable. The shadow of a supposed act of injustice, which had hung over him since his father's death, was so vague and formless that it might be the result of a reality widely remote from his idea of it. But, if his apprehensions should prove to be well founded, he was ready at any moment to lay down all he had, and begin the world anew. As the fierce dark teaching of his childhood had never sunk into his heart, so that first article in his code of morals was, that he must begin, in practical humility, with looking well to his feet on Earth, and that he could never mount on wings of words to Heaven. Duty on earth, restitution on earth, action on earth; these first, as the first steep steps upward. Strait was the gate and narrow was the way; far straiter and narrower than the broad high road paved with vain professions and vain repetitions, motes from other men's eyes and liberal delivery of others to the judgmentall cheap materials costing absolutely nothing.

No. It was not a selfish fear or hesitation that rendered him uneasy, but a mistrust lest Pancks might not observe his part of the understanding between them, and, making any discovery, might take some course upon it without imparting it to him. On the other hand, when he recalled his conversation with Pancks, and the little reason he had to suppose that there was any likelihood of that strange personage being on that track at all, there were times when he wondered that he made so much of it. Labouring in this sea, as all barks labour in cross seas, he tossed about and came to no haven.

The removal of Little Dorrit herself from their customary association, did not mend the matter. She was so much out, and so much in her own room, that he began to miss her and to find a blank in her place. He had written to her to inquire if she were better, and she had written back, very gratefully and earnestly telling him not to be uneasy on her behalf, for she was quite well; but he had not seen her, for what, in their intercourse, was a long time.

He returned home one evening from an interview with her father, who had mentioned that she was out visitingwhich was what he always said when she was hard at work to buy his supperand found Mr Meagles in an excited state

walking up and down his room. On his opening the door, Mr Meagles stopped, faced round, and said:

'Clennam!Tattycoram!'

'What's the matter?'

'Lost!'

'Why, bless my heart alive!' cried Clennam in amazement. 'What do you mean?'

'Wouldn't count fiveandtwenty, sir; couldn't be got to do it; stopped at eight, and took herself off.'

'Left your house?'

'Never to come back,' said Mr Meagles, shaking his head. 'You don't know that girl's passionate and proud character. A team of horses couldn't draw her back now; the bolts and bars of the old Bastille couldn't keep her.'

'How did it happen? Pray sit down and tell me.'

'As to how it happened, it's not so easy to relate: because you must have the unfortunate temperament of the poor impetuous girl herself, before you can fully understand it. But it came about in this way. Pet and Mother and I have been having a good deal of talk together of late. I'll not disguise from you, Clennam, that those conversations have not been of as bright a kind as I could wish; they have referred to our going away again. In proposing to do which, I have had, in fact, an object.'

Nobody's heart beat quickly.

'An object,' said Mr Meagles, after a moment's pause, 'that I will not disguise from you, either, Clennam. There's an inclination on the part of my dear child which I am sorry for. Perhaps you guess the person. Henry Gowan.'

'I was not unprepared to hear it.'

'Well!' said Mr Meagles, with a heavy sigh, 'I wish to God you had never had to hear it. However, so it is. Mother and I have done all we could to get the better of it, Clennam. We have tried tender advice, we have tried time, we have tried absence. As yet, of no use. Our late conversations have been upon the subject of going away for another year at least, in order that there might be an entire separation and breaking off for that term. Upon that question, Pet has been unhappy, and therefore Mother and I have been unhappy.' Clennam said that he could easily believe it.

'Well!' continued Mr Meagles in an apologetic way, 'I admit as a practical man,

and I am sure Mother would admit as a practical woman, that we do, in families, magnify our troubles and make mountains of our molehills in a way that is calculated to be rather trying to people who look onto mere outsiders, you know, Clennam.

Still, Pet's happiness or unhappiness is quite a life or death question with us; and we may be excused, I hope, for making much of it. At all events, it might have been borne by Tattycoram. Now, don't you think so?'

'I do indeed think so,' returned Clennam, in most emphatic recognition of this very moderate expectation.

'No, sir,' said Mr Meagles, shaking his head ruefully. 'She couldn't stand it. The chafing and firing of that girl, the wearing and tearing of that girl within her own breast, has been such that I have softly said to her again and again in passing her, "Fiveandtwenty, Tattycoram, fiveandtwenty!" I heartily wish she could have gone on counting fiveandtwenty day and night, and then it wouldn't have happened.'

Mr Meagles with a despondent countenance in which the goodness of his heart was even more expressed than in his times of cheerfulness and gaiety, stroked his face down from his forehead to his chin, and shook his head again.

'I said to Mother (not that it was necessary, for she would have thought it all for herself), we are practical people, my dear, and we know her story; we see in this unhappy girl some reflection of what was raging in her mother's heart before ever such a creature as this poor thing was in the world; we'll gloss her temper over, Mother, we won't notice it at present, my dear, we'll take advantage of some better disposition in her another time. So we said nothing. But, do what we would, it seems as if it was to be; she broke out violently one night.'

'How, and why?'

'If you ask me Why,' said Mr Meagles, a little disturbed by the question, for he was far more intent on softening her case than the family's, 'I can only refer you to what I have just repeated as having been pretty near my words to Mother. As to How, we had said Good night to Pet in her presence (very affectionately, I must allow), and she had attended Pet upstairsyou remember she was her maid. Perhaps Pet, having been out of sorts, may have been a little more inconsiderate than usual in requiring services of her: but I don't know that I have any right to say so; she was always thoughtful and gentle.'

'The gentlest mistress in the world.'

'Thank you, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, shaking him by the hand; 'you have

often seen them together. Well! We presently heard this unfortunate Tattycoram loud and angry, and before we could ask what was the matter, Pet came back in a tremble, saying she was frightened of her. Close after her came Tattycoram in a flaming rage. "I hate you all three," says she, stamping her foot at us. "I am bursting with hate of the whole house.'"

'Upon which you?'

'I?' said Mr Meagles, with a plain good faith that might have commanded the belief of Mrs Gowan herself. 'I said, count fiveandtwenty, Tattycoram.'

Mr Meagles again stroked his face and shook his head, with an air of profound regret.

'She was so used to do it, Clennam, that even then, such a picture of passion as you never saw, she stopped short, looked me full in the face, and counted (as I made out) to eight. But she couldn't control herself to go any further. There she broke down, poor thing, and gave the other seventeen to the four winds. Then it all burst out. She detested us, she was miserable with us, she couldn't bear it, she wouldn't bear it, she was determined to go away. She was younger than her young mistress, and would she remain to see her always held up as the only creature who was young and interesting, and to be cherished and loved? No. She wouldn't, she wouldn't, she wouldn't! What did we think she, Tattycoram, might have been if she had been caressed and cared for in her childhood, like her young mistress? As good as her? Ah! Perhaps fifty times as good. When we pretended to be so fond of one another, we exulted over her; that was what we did; we exulted over her and shamed her. And all in the house did the same. They talked about their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters; they liked to drag them up before her face. There was Mrs Tickit, only yesterday, when her little grandchild was with her, had been amused by the child's trying to call her (Tattycoram) by the wretched name we gave her; and had laughed at the name. Why, who didn't; and who were we that we should have a right to name her like a dog or a cat? But she didn't care. She would take no more benefits from us; she would fling us her name back again, and she would go. She would leave us that minute, nobody should stop her, and we should never hear of her again.'

Mr Meagles had recited all this with such a vivid remembrance of his original, that he was almost as flushed and hot by this time as he described her to have been.

'Ah, well!' he said, wiping his face. 'It was of no use trying reason then, with that vehement panting creature (Heaven knows what her mother's story must have been); so I quietly told her that she should not go at that late hour of night, and I gave her MY hand and took her to her room, and locked the house

doors. But she was gone this morning.' 'And you know no more of her?'

'No more,' returned Mr Meagles. 'I have been hunting about all day. She must have gone very early and very silently. I have found no trace of her down about us.'

'Stay! You want,' said Clennam, after a moment's reflection, 'to see her? I assume that?'

'Yes, assuredly; I want to give her another chance; Mother and Pet want to give her another chance; come! You yourself,' said Mr Meagles, persuasively, as if the provocation to be angry were not his own at all, 'want to give the poor passionate girl another chance, I know, Clennam.'

'It would be strange and hard indeed if I did not,' said Clennam, 'when you are all so forgiving. What I was going to ask you was, have you thought of that Miss Wade?'

'I have. I did not think of her until I had pervaded the whole of our neighbourhood, and I don't know that I should have done so then but for finding Mother and Pet, when I went home, full of the idea that Tattycoram must have gone to her. Then, of course, I recalled what she said that day at dinner when you were first with US.'

'Have you any idea where Miss Wade is to be found?'

'To tell you the truth,' returned Mr Meagles, 'it's because I have an addled jumble of a notion on that subject that you found me waiting here. There is one of those odd impressions in my house, which do mysteriously get into houses sometimes, which nobody seems to have picked up in a distinct form from anybody, and yet which everybody seems to have got hold of loosely from somebody and let go again, that she lives, or was living, thereabouts.' Mr Meagles handed him a slip of paper, on which was written the name of one of the dull bystreets in the Grosvenor region, near Park Lane.

'Here is no number,' said Arthur looking over it.

'No number, my dear Clennam?' returned his friend. 'No anything! The very name of the street may have been floating in the air; for, as I tell you, none of my people can say where they got it from. However, it's worth an inquiry; and as I would rather make it in company than alone, and as you too were a fellowtraveller of that immovable woman's, I thought perhaps' Clennam finished the sentence for him by taking up his hat again, and saying he was ready.

It was now summertime; a grey, hot, dusty evening. They rode to the top of Oxford Street, and there alighting, dived in among the great streets of

melancholy stateliness, and the little streets that try to be as stately and succeed in being more melancholy, of which there is a labyrinth near Park Lane. Wildernesses of corner houses, with barbarous old porticoes and appurtenances; horrors that came into existence under some wrongheaded person in some wrongheaded time, still demanding the blind admiration of all ensuing generations and determined to do so until they tumbled down; frowned upon the twilight. Parasite little tenements, with the cramp in their whole frame, from the dwarf halldoor on the giant model of His Grace's in the Square to the squeezed window of the boudoir commanding the dunghills in the Mews, made the evening doleful. Rickety dwellings of undoubted fashion, but of a capacity to hold nothing comfortably except a dismal smell, looked like the last result of the great mansions' breeding inandin; and, where their little supplementary bows and balconies were supported on thin iron columns, seemed to be scrofulously resting upon crutches.

Here and there a Hatchment, with the whole science of Heraldry in it, loomed down upon the street, like an Archbishop discoursing on Vanity. The shops, few in number, made no show; for popular opinion was as nothing to them. The pastrycook knew who was on his books, and in that knowledge could be calm, with a few glass cylinders of dowager peppermintdrops in his window, and halfadozen ancient specimens of currantjelly. A few oranges formed the greengrocer's whole concession to the vulgar mind. A single basket made of moss, once containing plovers' eggs, held all that the poulterer had to say to the rabble. Everybody in those streets seemed (which is always the case at that hour and season) to be gone out to dinner, and nobody seemed to be giving the dinners they had gone to. On the doorsteps there were lounging footmen with bright particoloured plumage and white polls, like an extinct race of monstrous birds; and butlers, solitary men of recluse demeanour, each of whom appeared distrustful of all other butlers. The roll of carriages in the Park was done for the day; the street lamps were lighting; and wicked little grooms in the tightest fitting garments, with twists in their legs answering to the twists in their minds, hung about in pairs, chewing straws and exchanging fraudulent secrets. The spotted dogs who went out with the carriages, and who were so associated with splendid equipages that it looked like a condescension in those animals to come out without them, accompanied helpers to and fro on messages. Here and there was a retiring publichouse which did not require to be supported on the shoulders of the people, and where gentlemen out of livery were not much wanted.

This last discovery was made by the two friends in pursuing their inquiries. Nothing was there, or anywhere, known of such a person as Miss Wade, in connection with the street they sought. It was one of the parasite streets; long, regular, narrow, dull and gloomy; like a brick and mortar funeral. They

inquired at several little area gates, where a dejected youth stood spiking his chin on the summit of a precipitous little shoot of wooden steps, but could gain no information. They walked up the street on one side of the way, and down it on the other, what time two vociferous newssellers, announcing an extraordinary event that had never happened and never would happen, pitched their hoarse voices into the secret chambers; but nothing came of it. At length they stood at the corner from which they had begun, and it had fallen quite dark, and they were no wiser.

It happened that in the street they had several times passed a dingy house, apparently empty, with bills in the windows, announcing that it was to let. The bills, as a variety in the funeral procession, almost amounted to a decoration. Perhaps because they kept the house separated in his mind, or perhaps because Mr Meagles and himself had twice agreed in passing, 'It is clear she don't live there,' Clennam now proposed that they should go back and try that house before finally going away. Mr Meagles agreed, and back they went.

They knocked once, and they rang once, without any response.

'Empty,' said Mr Meagles, listening. 'Once more,' said Clennam, and knocked again. After that knock they heard a movement below, and somebody shuffling up towards the door.

The confined entrance was so dark that it was impossible to make out distinctly what kind of person opened the door; but it appeared to be an old woman. 'Excuse our troubling you,' said Clennam. 'Pray can you tell us where Miss Wade lives?' The voice in the darkness unexpectedly replied, 'Lives here.'

'Is she at home?'

No answer coming, Mr Meagles asked again. 'Pray is she at home?'

After another delay, 'I suppose she is,' said the voice abruptly; 'you had better come in, and I'll ask.'

They 'were summarily shut into the close black house; and the figure rustling away, and speaking from a higher level, said, 'Come up, if you please; you can't tumble over anything.' They groped their way upstairs towards a faint light, which proved to be the light of the street shining through a window; and the figure left them shut in an airless room.

'This is odd, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, softly.

'Odd enough,' assented Clennam in the same tone, 'but we have succeeded; that's the main point. Here's a light coming!'

The light was a lamp, and the bearer was an old woman: very dirty, very

wrinkled and dry. 'She's at home,' she said (and the voice was the same that had spoken before); 'she'll come directly.' Having set the lamp down on the table, the old woman dusted her hands on her apron, which she might have done for ever without cleaning them, looked at the visitors with a dim pair of eyes, and backed out.

The lady whom they had come to see, if she were the present occupant of the house, appeared to have taken up her quarters there as she might have established herself in an Eastern caravanserai. A small square of carpet in the middle of the room, a few articles of furniture that evidently did not belong to the room, and a disorder of trunks and travelling articles, formed the whole of her surroundings. Under some former regular inhabitant, the stifling little apartment had broken out into a pierglass and a gilt table; but the gilding was as faded as last year's flowers, and the glass was so clouded that it seemed to hold in magic preservation all the fogs and bad weather it had ever reflected. The visitors had had a minute or two to look about them, when the door opened and Miss Wade came in.

She was exactly the same as when they had parted, just as handsome, just as scornful, just as repressed. She manifested no surprise in seeing them, nor any other emotion. She requested them to be seated; and declining to take a seat herself, at once anticipated any introduction of their business.

'I apprehend,' she said, 'that I know the cause of your favouring me with this visit. We may come to it at once.'

'The cause then, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, 'is Tattycoram.'

'So I supposed.'

'Miss Wade,' said Mr Meagles, 'will you be so kind as to say whether you know anything of her?'

'Surely. I know she is here with me.'

'Then, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, 'allow me to make known to you that I shall be happy to have her back, and that my wife and daughter will be happy to have her back. She has been with us a long time: we don't forget her claims upon us, and I hope we know how to make allowances.'

'You hope to know how to make allowances?' she returned, in a level, measured voice. 'For what?'

'I think my friend would say, Miss Wade,' Arthur Clennam interposed, seeing Mr Meagles rather at a loss, 'for the passionate sense that sometimes comes upon the poor girl, of being at a disadvantage. Which occasionally gets the better of better remembrances.'

The lady broke into a smile as she turned her eyes upon him. 'Indeed?' was all she answered.

She stood by the table so perfectly composed and still after this acknowledgment of his remark that Mr Meagles stared at her under a sort of fascination, and could not even look to Clennam to make another move. After waiting, awkwardly enough, for some moments, Arthur said: 'Perhaps it would be well if Mr Meagles could see her, Miss Wade?'

'That is easily done,' said she. 'Come here, child.' She had opened a door while saying this, and now led the girl in by the hand. It was very curious to see them standing together: the girl with her disengaged fingers plaiting the bosom of her dress, half irresolutely, half passionately; Miss Wade with her composed face attentively regarding her, and suggesting to an observer, with extraordinary force, in her composure itself (as a veil will suggest the form it covers), the unquenchable passion of her own nature.

'See here,' she said, in the same level way as before. 'Here is your patron, your master. He is willing to take you back, my dear, if you are sensible of the favour and choose to go. You can be, again, a foil to his pretty daughter, a slave to her pleasant wilfulness, and a toy in the house showing the goodness of the family. You can have your droll name again, playfully pointing you out and setting you apart, as it is right that you should be pointed out and set apart. (Your birth, you know; you must not forget your birth.) You can again be shown to this gentleman's daughter, Harriet, and kept before her, as a living reminder of her own superiority and her gracious condescension. You can recover all these advantages and many more of the same kind which I dare say start up in your memory while I speak, and which you lose in taking refuge with meyou can recover them all by telling these gentlemen how humbled and penitent you are, and by going back to them to be forgiven. What do you say, Harriet? Will you go?'

The girl who, under the influence of these words, had gradually risen in anger and heightened in colour, answered, raising her lustrous black eyes for the moment, and clenching her hand upon the folds it had been puckering up, 'I'd die sooner!'

Miss Wade, still standing at her side holding her hand, looked quietly round and said with a smile, 'Gentlemen! What do you do upon that?'

Poor Mr Meagles's inexpressible consternation in hearing his motives and actions so perverted, had prevented him from interposing any word until now; but now he regained the power of speech.

'Tattycoram,' said he, 'for I'll call you by that name still, my good girl, conscious that I meant nothing but kindness when I gave it to you, and

conscious that you know it'

'I don't!' said she, looking up again, and almost rending herself with the same busy hand.

'No, not now, perhaps,' said Mr Meagles; 'not with that lady's eyes so intent upon you, Tattycoram,' she glanced at them for a moment, 'and that power over you, which we see she exercises; not now, perhaps, but at another time. Tattycoram, I'll not ask that lady whether she believes what she has said, even in the anger and ill blood in which I and my friend here equally know she has spoken, though she subdues herself, with a determination that any one who has once seen her is not likely to forget. I'll not ask you, with your remembrance of my house and all belonging to it, whether you believe it. I'll only say that you have no profession to make to me or mine, and no forgiveness to entreat; and that all in the world that I ask you to do, is, to count fiveandtwenty, Tattycoram.'

She looked at him for an instant, and then said frowningly, 'I won't. Miss Wade, take me away, please.'

The contention that raged within her had no softening in it now; it was wholly between passionate defiance and stubborn defiance. Her rich colour, her quick blood, her rapid breath, were all setting themselves against the opportunity of retracing their steps. 'I won't. I won't. I won't!' she repeated in a low, thick voice. 'I'd be torn to pieces first. I'd tear myself to pieces first!'

Miss Wade, who had released her hold, laid her hand protectingly on the girl's neck for a moment, and then said, looking round with her former smile and speaking exactly in her former tone, 'Gentlemen! What do you do upon that?'

'Oh, Tattycoram, Tattycoram!' cried Mr Meagles, adjuring her besides with an earnest hand. 'Hear that lady's voice, look at that lady's face, consider what is in that lady's heart, and think what a future lies before you. My child, whatever you may think, that lady's influence over youastonishing to us, and I should hardly go too far in saying terrible to us to seeis founded in passion fiercer than yours, and temper more violent than yours. What can you two be together? What can come of it?'

'I am alone here, gentlemen,' observed Miss Wade, with no change of voice or manner. 'Say anything you will.'

'Politeness must yield to this misguided girl, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, 'at her present pass; though I hope not altogether to dismiss it, even with the injury you do her so strongly before me. Excuse me for reminding you in her hearingI must say itthat you were a mystery to all of us, and had nothing in common with any of us when she unfortunately fell in your way. I don't know

what you are, but you don't hide, can't hide, what a dark spirit you have within you. If it should happen that you are a woman, who, from whatever cause, has a perverted delight in making a sisterwoman as wretched as she is (I am old enough to have heard of such), I warn her against you, and I warn you against yourself.'

'Gentlemen!' said Miss Wade, calmly. 'When you have concludedMr Clennam, perhaps you will induce your friend'

'Not without another effort,' said Mr Meagles, stoutly. 'Tattycoram, my poor dear girl, count fiveandtwenty.' 'Do not reject the hope, the certainty, this kind man offers you,' said Clennam in a low emphatic voice. 'Turn to the friends you have not forgotten. Think once more!'

'I won't! Miss Wade,' said the girl, with her bosom swelling high, and speaking with her hand held to her throat, 'take me away!'

'Tattycoram,' said Mr Meagles. 'Once more yet! The only thing I ask of you in the world, my child! Count fiveandtwenty!'

She put her hands tightly over her ears, confusedly tumbling down her bright black hair in the vehemence of the action, and turned her face resolutely to the wall. Miss Wade, who had watched her under this final appeal with that strange attentive smile, and that repressing hand upon her own bosom with which she had watched her in her struggle at Marseilles, then put her arm about her waist as if she took possession of her for evermore.

And there was a visible triumph in her face when she turned it to dismiss the visitors.

'As it is the last time I shall have the honour,' she said, 'and as you have spoken of not knowing what I am, and also of the foundation of my influence here, you may now know that it is founded in a common cause. What your broken plaything is as to birth, I am. She has no name, I have no name. Her wrong is my wrong. I have nothing more to say to you.'

This was addressed to Mr Meagles, who sorrowfully went out. As Clennam followed, she said to him, with the same external composure and in the same level voice, but with a smile that is only seen on cruel faces: a very faint smile, lifting the nostril, scarcely touching the lips, and not breaking away gradually, but instantly dismissed when done with:

'I hope the wife of your dear friend Mr Gowan, may be happy in the contrast of her extraction to this girl's and mine, and in the high good fortune that awaits her.'

CHAPTER 28

. Nobody's Disappearance

Not resting satisfied with the endeavours he had made to recover his lost charge, Mr Meagles addressed a letter of remonstrance, breathing nothing but goodwill, not only to her, but to Miss Wade too. No answer coming to these epistles, or to another written to the stubborn girl by the hand of her late young mistress, which might have melted her if anything could (all three letters were returned weeks afterwards as having been refused at the housedoor), he deputed Mrs Meagles to make the experiment of a personal interview. That worthy lady being unable to obtain one, and being steadfastly denied admission, Mr Meagles besought Arthur to essay once more what he could do. All that came of his compliance was, his discovery that the empty house was left in charge of the old woman, that Miss Wade was gone, that the waifs and strays of furniture were gone, and that the old woman would accept any number of halfcrowns and thank the donor kindly, but had no information whatever to exchange for those coins, beyond constantly offering for perusal a memorandum relative to fixtures, which the houseagent's young man had left in the hall.

Unwilling, even under this discomfiture, to resign the ingrate and leave her hopeless, in case of her better dispositions obtaining the mastery over the darker side of her character, Mr Meagles, for six successive days, published a discreetly covert advertisement in the morning papers, to the effect that if a certain young person who had lately left home without reflection, would at any time apply to his address at Twickenham, everything would be as it had been before, and no reproaches need be apprehended. The unexpected consequences of this notification suggested to the dismayed Mr Meagles for the first time that some hundreds of young persons must be leaving their homes without reflection every day; for shoals of wrong young people came down to Twickenham, who, not finding themselves received with enthusiasm, generally demanded compensation by way of damages, in addition to coachhire there and back. Nor were these the only uninvited clients whom the advertisement produced. The swarm of beggingletter writers, who would seem to be always watching eagerly for any hook, however small, to hang a letter upon, wrote to say that having seen the advertisement, they were induced to apply with confidence for various sums, ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds: not because they knew anything about the young person, but because they felt that to part with those donations would greatly relieve the advertiser's mind. Several projectors, likewise, availed themselves of the same opportunity

to correspond with Mr Meagles; as, for example, to apprise him that their attention having been called to the advertisement by a friend, they begged to state that if they should ever hear anything of the young person, they would not fail to make it known to him immediately, and that in the meantime if he would oblige them with the funds necessary for bringing to perfection a certain entirely novel description of Pump, the happiest results would ensue to mankind.

Mr Meagles and his family, under these combined discouragements, had begun reluctantly to give up Tattycoram as irrecoverable, when the new and active firm of Doyce and Clennam, in their private capacities, went down on a Saturday to stay at the cottage until Monday. The senior partner took the coach, and the junior partner took his walkingstick.

A tranquil summer sunset shone upon him as he approached the end of his walk, and passed through the meadows by the river side. He had that sense of peace, and of being lightened of a weight of care, which country quiet awakens in the breasts of dwellers in towns. Everything within his view was lovely and placid. The rich foliage of the trees, the luxuriant grass diversified with wild flowers, the little green islands in the river, the beds of rushes, the waterlilies floating on the surface of the stream, the distant voices in boats borne musically towards him on the ripple of the water and the evening air, were all expressive of rest. In the occasional leap of a fish, or dip of an oar, or twittering of a bird not yet at roost, or distant barking of a dog, or lowing of a cowin all such sounds, there was the prevailing breath of rest, which seemed to encompass him in every scent that sweetened the fragrant air. The long lines of red and gold in the sky, and the glorious track of the descending sun, were all divinely calm. Upon the purple treetops far away, and on the green height near at hand up which the shades were slowly creeping, there was an equal hush. Between the real landscape and its shadow in the water, there was no division; both were so untroubled and clear, and, while so fraught with solemn mystery of life and death, so hopefully reassuring to the gazer's soothed heart, because so tenderly and mercifully beautiful.

Clennam had stopped, not for the first time by many times, to look about him and suffer what he saw to sink into his soul, as the shadows, looked at, seemed to sink deeper and deeper into the water. He was slowly resuming his way, when he saw a figure in the path before him which he had, perhaps, already associated with the evening and its impressions.

Minnie was there, alone. She had some roses in her hand, and seemed to have stood still on seeing him, waiting for him. Her face was towards him, and she appeared to have been coming from the opposite direction. There was a flutter in her manner, which Clennam had never seen in it before; and as he came

near her, it entered his mind all at once that she was there of a set purpose to speak to him.

She gave him her hand, and said, 'You wonder to see me here by myself? But the evening is so lovely, I have strolled further than I meant at first. I thought it likely I might meet you, and that made me more confident. You always come this way, do you not?'

As Clennam said that it was his favourite way, he felt her hand falter on his arm, and saw the roses shake.

'Will you let me give you one, Mr Clennam? I gathered them as I came out of the garden. Indeed, I almost gathered them for you, thinking it so likely I might meet you. Mr Doyce arrived more than an hour ago, and told us you were walking down.'

His own hand shook, as he accepted a rose or two from hers and thanked her. They were now by an avenue of trees. Whether they turned into it on his movement or on hers matters little. He never knew how that was.

'It is very grave here,' said Clennam, 'but very pleasant at this hour. Passing along this deep shade, and out at that arch of light at the other end, we come upon the ferry and the cottage by the best approach, I think.' In her simple gardenhat and her light summer dress, with her rich brown hair naturally clustering about her, and her wonderful eyes raised to his for a moment with a look in which regard for him and trustfulness in him were strikingly blended with a kind of timid sorrow for him, she was so beautiful that it was well for his peaceor ill for his peace, he did not quite know whichthat he had made that vigorous resolution he had so often thought about.

She broke a momentary silence by inquiring if he knew that papa had been thinking of another tour abroad? He said he had heard it mentioned. She broke another momentary silence by adding, with some hesitation, that papa had abandoned the idea.

At this, he thought directly, 'they are to be married.'

'Mr Clennam,' she said, hesitating more timidly yet, and speaking so low that he bent his head to hear her. 'I should very much like to give you my confidence, if you would not mind having the goodness to receive it. I should have very much liked to have given it to you long ago, becauseI felt that you were becoming so much our friend.'

'How can I be otherwise than proud of it at any time! Pray give it to me. Pray trust me.'

'I could never have been afraid of trusting you,' she returned, raising her eyes

frankly to his face. 'I think I would have done so some time ago, if I had known how. But I scarcely know how, even now.'

'Mr Gowan,' said Arthur Clennam, 'has reason to be very happy. God bless his wife and him!'

She wept, as she tried to thank him. He reassured her, took her hand as it lay with the trembling roses in it on his arm, took the remaining roses from it, and put it to his lips. At that time, it seemed to him, he first finally resigned the dying hope that had flickered in nobody's heart so much to its pain and trouble; and from that time he became in his own eyes, as to any similar hope or prospect, a very much older man who had done with that part of life.

He put the roses in his breast and they walked on for a little while, slowly and silently, under the umbrageous trees. Then he asked her, in a voice of cheerful kindness, was there anything else that she would say to him as her friend and her father's friend, many years older than herself; was there any trust she would repose in him, any service she would ask of him, any little aid to her happiness that she could give him the lasting gratification of believing it was in his power to render?

She was going to answer, when she was so touched by some little hidden sorrow or sympathywhat could it have been?that she said, bursting into tears again: 'O Mr Clennam! Good, generous, Mr Clennam, pray tell me you do not blame me.'

'I blame you?' said Clennam. 'My dearest girl! I blame you? No!'

After clasping both her hands upon his arm, and looking confidentially up into his face, with some hurried words to the effect that she thanked him from her heart (as she did, if it be the source of earnestness), she gradually composed herself, with now and then a word of encouragement from him, as they walked on slowly and almost silently under the darkening trees.

'And, now, Minnie Gowan,' at length said Clennam, smiling; 'will you ask me nothing?'

'Oh! I have very much to ask of you.'

'That's well! I hope so; I am not disappointed.'

'You know how I am loved at home, and how I love home. You can hardly think it perhaps, dear Mr Clennam,' she spoke with great agitation, 'seeing me going from it of my own free will and choice, but I do so dearly love it!'

'I am sure of that,' said Clennam. 'Can you suppose I doubt it?'

'No, no. But it is strange, even to me, that loving it so much and being so much

beloved in it, I can bear to cast it away. It seems so neglectful of it, so unthankful.'

'My dear girl,' said Clennam, 'it is in the natural progress and change of time. All homes are left so.'

'Yes, I know; but all homes are not left with such a blank in them as there will be in mine when I am gone. Not that there is any scarcity of far better and more endearing and more accomplished girls than I am; not that I am much, but that they have made so much of me!'

Pet's affectionate heart was overcharged, and she sobbed while she pictured what would happen.

'I know what a change papa will feel at first, and I know that at first I cannot be to him anything like what I have been these many years. And it is then, Mr Clennam, then more than at any time, that I beg and entreat you to remember him, and sometimes to keep him company when you can spare a little while; and to tell him that you know I was fonder of him when I left him, than I ever was in all my life. For there is nobodyhe told me so himself when he talked to me this very daythere is nobody he likes so well as you, or trusts so much.'

A clue to what had passed between the father and daughter dropped like a heavy stone into the well of Clennam's heart, and swelled the water to his eyes. He said, cheerily, but not quite so cheerily as he tried to say, that it should be donethat he gave her his faithful promise.

'If I do not speak of mama,' said Pet, more moved by, and more pretty in, her innocent grief, than Clennam could trust himself even to considerfor which reason he counted the trees between them and the fading light as they slowly diminished in number'it is because mama will understand me better in this action, and will feel my loss in a different way, and will look forward in a different manner. But you know what a dear, devoted mother she is, and you will remember her too; will you not?'

Let Minnie trust him, Clennam said, let Minnie trust him to do all she wished.

'And, dear Mr Clennam,' said Minnie, 'because papa and one whom I need not name, do not fully appreciate and understand one another yet, as they will byandby; and because it will be the duty, and the pride, and pleasure of my new life, to draw them to a better knowledge of one another, and to be a happiness to one another, and to be proud of one another, and to love one another, both loving me so dearly; oh, as you are a kind, true man! when I am first separated from home (I am going a long distance away), try to reconcile papa to him a little more, and use your great influence to keep him before papa's mind free from prejudice and in his real form. Will you do this for me,

as you are a noblehearted friend?'

Poor Pet! Selfdeceived, mistaken child! When were such changes ever made in men's natural relations to one another: when was such reconcilement of ingrain differences ever effected! It has been tried many times by other daughters, Minnie; it has never succeeded; nothing has ever come of it but failure.

So Clennam thought. So he did not say; it was too late. He bound himself to do all she asked, and she knew full well that he would do it.

They were now at the last tree in the avenue. She stopped, and withdrew her arm. Speaking to him with her eyes lifted up to his, and with the hand that had lately rested on his sleeve trembling by touching one of the roses in his breast as an additional appeal to him, she said:

'Dear Mr Clennam, in my happinessfor I am happy, though you have seen me cryingI cannot bear to leave any cloud between us. If you have anything to forgive me (not anything that I have wilfully done, but any trouble I may have caused you without meaning it, or having it in my power to help it), forgive me tonight out of your noble heart!'

He stooped to meet the guileless face that met his without shrinking. He kissed it, and answered, Heaven knew that he had nothing to forgive. As he stooped to meet the innocent face once again, she whispered, 'Goodbye!' and he repeated it. It was taking leave of all his old hopesall nobody's old restless doubts. They came out of the avenue next moment, arminarm as they had entered it: and the trees seemed to close up behind them in the darkness, like their own perspective of the past.

The voices of Mr and Mrs Meagles and Doyce were audible directly, speaking near the garden gate. Hearing Pet's name among them, Clennam called out, 'She is here, with me.' There was some little wondering and laughing until they came up; but as soon as they had all come together, it ceased, and Pet glided away.

Mr Meagles, Doyce, and Clennam, without speaking, walked up and down on the brink of the river, in the light of the rising moon, for a few minutes; and then Doyce lingered behind, and went into the house. Mr Meagles and Clennam walked up and down together for a few minutes more without speaking, until at length the former broke silence.

'Arthur,' said he, using that familiar address for the first time in their communication, 'do you remember my telling you, as we walked up and down one hot morning, looking over the harbour at Marseilles, that Pet's baby sister who was dead seemed to Mother and me to have grown as she had grown, and

changed as she had changed?'

'Very well.'

'You remember my saying that our thoughts had never been able to separate those twin sisters, and that, in our fancy, whatever Pet was, the other was?'

'Yes, very well.'

'Arthur,' said Mr Meagles, much subdued, 'I carry that fancy further tonight. I feel tonight, my dear fellow, as if you had loved my dead child very tenderly, and had lost her when she was like what Pet is now.'

'Thank you!' murmured Clennam, 'thank you!' And pressed his hand.

'Will you come in?' said Mr Meagles, presently.

'In a little while.'

Mr Meagles fell away, and he was left alone. When he had walked on the river's brink in the peaceful moonlight for some half an hour, he put his hand in his breast and tenderly took out the handful of roses. Perhaps he put them to his heart, perhaps he put them to his lips, but certainly he bent down on the shore and gently launched them on the flowing river. Pale and unreal in the moonlight, the river floated them away. The lights were bright within doors when he entered, and the faces on which they shone, his own face not excepted, were soon quietly cheerful. They talked of many subjects (his partner never had had such a ready store to draw upon for the beguiling of the time), and so to bed, and to sleep. While the flowers, pale and unreal in the moonlight, floated away upon the river; and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas.

CHAPTER 29.

Mrs Flintwinch goes on Dreaming

The house in the city preserved its heavy dulness through all these transactions, and the invalid within it turned the same unvarying round of life. Morning, noon, and night, morning, noon, and night, each recurring with its accompanying monotony, always the same reluctant return of the same sequences of machinery, like a dragging piece of clockwork.

The wheeled chair had its associated remembrances and reveries, one may suppose, as every place that is made the station of a human being has. Pictures

of demolished streets and altered houses, as they formerly were when the occupant of the chair was familiar with them, images of people as they too used to be, with little or no allowance made for the lapse of time since they were seen; of these, there must have been many in the long routine of gloomy days. To stop the clock of busy existence at the hour when we were personally sequestered from it, to suppose mankind stricken motionless when we were brought to a standstill, to be unable to measure the changes beyond our view by any larger standard than the shrunken one of our own uniform and contracted existence, is the infirmity of many invalids, and the mental unhealthiness of almost all recluses.

What scenes and actors the stern woman most reviewed, as she sat from season to season in her one dark room, none knew but herself. Mr Flintwinch, with his wry presence brought to bear upon her daily like some eccentric mechanical force, would perhaps have screwed it out of her, if there had been less resistance in her; but she was too strong for him. So far as Mistress Affery was concerned, to regard her liegelord and her disabled mistress with a face of blank wonder, to go about the house after dark with her apron over her head, always to listen for the strange noises and sometimes to hear them, and never to emerge from her ghostly, dreamy, sleepwaking state, was occupation enough for her.

There was a fair stroke of business doing, as Mistress Affery made out, for her husband had abundant occupation in his little office, and saw more people than had been used to come there for some years. This might easily be, the house having been long deserted; but he did receive letters, and comers, and keep books, and correspond. Moreover, he went about to other countinghouses, and to wharves, and docks, and to the Custom House,' and to Garraway's Coffee House, and the Jerusalem Coffee House, and on 'Change; so that he was much in and out. He began, too, sometimes of an evening, when Mrs Clennam expressed no particular wish for his society, to resort to a tavern in the neighbourhood to look at the shipping news and closing prices in the evening paper, and even to exchange Small socialities with mercantile Sea Captains who frequented that establishment. At some period of every day, he and Mrs Clennam held a council on matters of business; and it appeared to Affery, who was always groping about, listening and watching, that the two clever ones were making money.

The state of mind into which Mr Flintwinch's dazed lady had fallen, had now begun to be so expressed in all her looks and actions that she was held in very low account by the two clever ones, as a person, never of strong intellect, who was becoming foolish. Perhaps because her appearance was not of a commercial cast, or perhaps because it occurred to him that his having taken her to wife might expose his judgment to doubt in the minds of customers, Mr

Flintwinch laid his commands upon her that she should hold her peace on the subject of her conjugal relations, and should no longer call him Jeremiah out of the domestic trio. Her frequent forgetfulness of this admonition intensified her startled manner, since Mr Flintwinch's habit of avenging himself on her remissness by making springs after her on the staircase, and shaking her, occasioned her to be always nervously uncertain when she might be thus waylaid next.

Little Dorrit had finished a long day's work in Mrs Clennam's room, and was neatly gathering up her shreds and odds and ends before going home. Mr Pancks, whom Affery had just shown in, was addressing an inquiry to Mrs Clennam on the subject of her health, coupled with the remark that, 'happening to find himself in that direction,' he had looked in to inquire, on behalf of his proprietor, how she found herself. Mrs Clennam, with a deep contraction of her brows, was looking at him.

'Mr Casby knows,' said she, 'that I am not subject to changes. The change that I await here is the great change.'

'Indeed, ma'am?' returned Mr Pancks, with a wandering eye towards the figure of the little seamstress on her knee picking threads and fraying of her work from the carpet. 'You look nicely, ma'am.'

'I bear what I have to bear,' she answered. 'Do you what you have to do.' 'Thank you, ma'am,' said Mr Pancks, 'such is my endeavour.'

'You are often in this direction, are you not?' asked Mrs Clennam.

'Why, yes, ma'am,' said Pancks, 'rather so lately; I have lately been round this way a good deal, owing to one thing and another.' 'Beg Mr Casby and his daughter not to trouble themselves, by deputy, about me. When they wish to see me, they know I am here to see them. They have no need to trouble themselves to send. You have no need to trouble yourself to come.' 'Not the least trouble, ma'am,' said Mr Pancks. 'You really are looking uncommonly nicely, ma'am.'

'Thank you. Good evening.'

The dismissal, and its accompanying finger pointed straight at the door, was so curt and direct that Mr Pancks did not see his way to prolong his visit. He stirred up his hair with his sprightliest expression, glanced at the little figure again, said 'Good evening, ma 'am; don't come down, Mrs Affery, I know the road to the door,' and steamed out. Mrs Clennam, her chin resting on her hand, followed him with attentive and darkly distrustful eyes; and Affery stood looking at her as if she were spellbound.

Slowly and thoughtfully, Mrs Clennam's eyes turned from the door by which Pancks had gone out, to Little Dorrit, rising from the carpet. With her chin drooping more heavily on her hand, and her eyes vigilant and lowering, the sick woman sat looking at her until she attracted her attention. Little Dorrit coloured under such a gaze, and looked down. Mrs Clennam still sat intent.

'Little Dorrit,' she said, when she at last broke silence, 'what do you know of that man?'

'I don't know anything of him, ma'am, except that I have seen him about, and that he has spoken to me.'

'What has he said to you?'

'I don't understand what he has said, he is so strange. But nothing rough or disagreeable.'

'Why does he come here to see you?'

'I don't know, ma'am,' said Little Dorrit, with perfect frankness.

'You know that he does come here to see you?'

'I have fancied so,' said Little Dorrit. 'But why he should come here or anywhere for that, ma'am, I can't think.'

Mrs Clennam cast her eyes towards the ground, and with her strong, set face, as intent upon a subject in her mind as it had lately been upon the form that seemed to pass out of her view, sat absorbed. Some minutes elapsed before she came out of this thoughtfulness, and resumed her hard composure.

Little Dorrit in the meanwhile had been waiting to go, but afraid to disturb her by moving. She now ventured to leave the spot where she had been standing since she had risen, and to pass gently round by the wheeled chair. She stopped at its side to say 'Good night, ma'am.'

Mrs Clennam put out her hand, and laid it on her arm. Little Dorrit, confused under the touch, stood faltering. Perhaps some momentary recollection of the story of the Princess may have been in her mind.

'Tell me, Little Dorrit,' said Mrs Clennam, 'have you many friends now?'

'Very few, ma'am. Besides you, only Miss Flora andone more.'

'Meaning,' said Mrs Clennam, with her unbent finger again pointing to the door, 'that man?'

'Oh no, ma'am!'

'Some friend of his, perhaps?'

'No ma'am.' Little Dorrit earnestly shook her head. 'Oh no! No one at all like him, or belonging to him.'

'Well!' said Mrs Clennam, almost smiling. 'It is no affair of mine. I ask, because I take an interest in you; and because I believe I was your friend when you had no other who could serve you. Is that so?'

'Yes, ma'am; indeed it is. I have been here many a time when, but for you and the work you gave me, we should have wanted everything.'

'We,' repeated Mrs Clennam, looking towards the watch, once her dead husband's, which always lay upon her table. 'Are there many of you?'

'Only father and I, now. I mean, only father and I to keep regularly out of what we get.'

'Have you undergone many privations? You and your father and who else there may be of you?' asked Mrs Clennam, speaking deliberately, and meditatively turning the watch over and over.

'Sometimes it has been rather hard to live,' said Little Dorrit, in her soft voice, and timid uncomplaining way; 'but I think not harderas to thatthan many people find it.'

'That's well said!' Mrs Clennam quickly returned. 'That's the truth! You are a good, thoughtful girl. You are a grateful girl too, or I much mistake you.'

'It is only natural to be that. There is no merit in being that,' said Little Dorrit. 'I am indeed.' Mrs Clennam, with a gentleness of which the dreaming Affery had never dreamed her to be capable, drew down the face of her little seamstress, and kissed her on the forehead. 'Now go, Little Dorrit,' said she,'or you will be late, poor child!'

In all the dreams Mistress Affery had been piling up since she first became devoted to the pursuit, she had dreamed nothing more astonishing than this. Her head ached with the idea that she would find the other clever one kissing Little Dorrit next, and then the two clever ones embracing each other and dissolving into tears of tenderness for all mankind. The idea quite stunned her, as she attended the light footsteps down the stairs, that the house door might be safely shut.

On opening it to let Little Dorrit out, she found Mr Pancks, instead of having gone his way, as in any less wonderful place and among less wonderful phenomena he might have been reasonably expected to do, fluttering up and down the court outside the house.

The moment he saw Little Dorrit, he passed her briskly, said with his finger to

his nose (as Mrs Affery distinctly heard), 'Pancks the gipsy, fortunetelling,' and went away. 'Lord save us, here's a gipsy and a fortuneteller in it now!' cried Mistress Affery. 'What next! She stood at the open door, staggering herself with this enigma, on a rainy, thundery evening. The clouds were flying fast, and the wind was coming up in gusts, banging some neighbouring shutters that had broken loose, twirling the rusty chimneycowls and weathercocks, and rushing round and round a confined adjacent churchyard as if it had a mind to blow the dead citizens out of their graves. The low thunder, muttering in all quarters of the sky at once, seemed to threaten vengeance for this attempted desecration, and to mutter, 'Let them rest! Let them rest!'

Mistress Affery, whose fear of thunder and lightning was only to be equalled by her dread of the haunted house with a premature and preternatural darkness in it, stood undecided whether to go in or not, until the question was settled for her by the door blowing upon her in a violent gust of wind and shutting her out. 'What's to be done now, what's to be done now!' cried Mistress Affery, wringing her hands in this last uneasy dream of all; 'when she's all alone by herself inside, and can no more come down to open it than the churchyard dead themselves!'

In this dilemma, Mistress Affery, with her apron as a hood to keep the rain off, ran crying up and down the solitary paved enclosure several times. Why she should then stoop down and look in at the keyhole of the door as if an eye would open it, it would be difficult to say; but it is none the less what most people would have done in the same situation, and it is what she did.

From this posture she started up suddenly, with a half scream, feeling something on her shoulder. It was the touch of a hand; of a man's hand.

The man was dressed like a traveller, in a foraging cap with fur about it, and a heap of cloak. He looked like a foreigner. He had a quantity of hair and moustachejet black, except at the shaggy ends, where it had a tinge of redand a high hook nose. He laughed at Mistress Affery's start and cry; and as he laughed, his moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache.

'What's the matter?' he asked in plain English. 'What are you frightened at?'

'At you,' panted Affery.

'Me, madam?'

'And the dismal evening, andand everything,' said Affery. 'And here! The wind has been and blown the door to, and I can't get in.'

'Hah!' said the gentleman, who took that very coolly. 'Indeed! Do you know

such a name as Clennam about here?'

'Lord bless us, I should think I did, I should think I did!' cried Affery, exasperated into a new wringing of hands by the inquiry.

'Where about here?'

'Where!' cried Affery, goaded into another inspection of the keyhole. 'Where but here in this house? And she's all alone in her room, and lost the use of her limbs and can't stir to help herself or me, and t'other clever one's out, and Lord forgive me!' cried Affery, driven into a frantic dance by these accumulated considerations, 'if I ain't agoing headlong out of my mind!'

Taking a warmer view of the matter now that it concerned himself, the gentleman stepped back to glance at the house, and his eye soon rested on the long narrow window of the little room near the halldoor.

'Where may the lady be who has lost the use of her limbs, madam?' he inquired, with that peculiar smile which Mistress Affery could not choose but keep her eyes upon.

'Up there!' said Affery. 'Them two windows.'

'Hah! I am of a fair size, but could not have the honour of presenting myself in that room without a ladder. Now, madam, franklyfrankness is a part of my charactershall I open the door for you?'

'Yes, bless you, sir, for a dear creetur, and do it at once,' cried Affery, 'for she may be acalling to me at this very present minute, or may be setting herself a fire and burning herself to death, or there's no knowing what may be happening to her, and me agoing out of my mind at thinking of it!'

'Stay, my good madam!' He restrained her impatience with a smooth white hand. 'Businesshours, I apprehend, are over for the day?' 'Yes, yes, yes,' cried Affery. 'Long ago.'

'Let me make, then, a fair proposal. Fairness is a part of my character. I am just landed from the packetboat, as you may see.'

He showed her that his cloak was very wet, and that his boots were saturated with water; she had previously observed that he was dishevelled and sallow, as if from a rough voyage, and so chilled that he could not keep his teeth from chattering. 'I am just landed from the packetboat, madam, and have been delayed by the weather: the infernal weather! In consequence of this, madam, some necessary business that I should otherwise have transacted here within the regular hours (necessary business because moneybusiness), still remains to be done. Now, if you will fetch any authorised neighbouring somebody to do it

in return for my opening the door, I'll open the door. If this arrangement should be objectionable, I'll' and with the same smile he made a significant feint of backing away.

Mistress Affery, heartily glad to effect the proposed compromise, gave in her willing adhesion to it. The gentleman at once requested her to do him the favour of holding his cloak, took a short run at the narrow window, made a leap at the sill, clung his way up the bricks, and in a moment had his hand at the sash, raising it. His eyes looked so very sinister, as he put his leg into the room and glanced round at Mistress Affery, that she thought with a sudden coldness, if he were to go straight upstairs to murder the invalid, what could she do to prevent him?

Happily he had no such purpose; for he reappeared, in a moment, at the house door. 'Now, my dear madam,' he said, as he took back his cloak and threw it on, 'if you have the goodness towhat the Devil's that!'

The strangest of sounds. Evidently close at hand from the peculiar shock it communicated to the air, yet subdued as if it were far off. A tremble, a rumble, and a fall of some light dry matter.

'What the Devil is it?'

'I don't know what it is, but I've heard the like of it over and over again,' said Affery, who had caught his arm. He could hardly be a very brave man, even she thought in her dreamy start and fright, for his trembling lips had turned colourless. After listening a few moments, he made light of it.

'Bah! Nothing! Now, my dear madam, I think you spoke of some clever personage. Will you be so good as to confront me with that genius?' He held the door in his hand, as though he were quite ready to shut her out again if she failed.

'Don't you say anything about the door and me, then,' whispered Affery.

'Not a word.'

'And don't you stir from here, or speak if she calls, while I run round the corner.'

'Madam, I am a statue.'

Affery had so vivid a fear of his going stealthily upstairs the moment her back was turned, that after hurrying out of sight, she returned to the gateway to peep at him. Seeing him still on the threshold, more out of the house than in it, as if he had no love for darkness and no desire to probe its mysteries, she flew into the next street, and sent a message into the tavern to Mr Flintwinch, who came

out directly. The two returning togetherthe lady in advance, and Mr Flintwinch coming up briskly behind, animated with the hope of shaking her before she could get housedsaw the gentleman standing in the same place in the dark, and heard the strong voice of Mrs Clennam calling from her room, 'Who is it? What is it? Why does no one answer? Who is that, down there?'

CHAPTER 30.

The Word of a Gentleman

When Mr and Mrs Flintwinch panted up to the door of the old house in the twilight, Jeremiah within a second of Affery, the stranger started back. 'Death of my soul!' he exclaimed. 'Why, how did you get here?'

Mr Flintwinch, to whom these words were spoken, repaid the stranger's wonder in full. He gazed at him with blank astonishment; he looked over his own shoulder, as expecting to see some one he had not been aware of standing behind him; he gazed at the stranger again, speechlessly, at a loss to know what he meant; he looked to his wife for explanation; receiving none, he pounced upon her, and shook her with such heartiness that he shook her cap off her head, saying between his teeth, with grim raillery, as he did it, 'Affery, my woman, you must have a dose, my woman! This is some of your tricks! You have been dreaming again, mistress. What's it about? Who is it? What does it mean! Speak out or be choked! It's the only choice I'll give you.'

Supposing Mistress Affery to have any power of election at the moment, her choice was decidedly to be choked; for she answered not a syllable to this adjuration, but, with her bare head wagging violently backwards and forwards, resigned herself to her punishment. The stranger, however, picking up her cap with an air of gallantry, interposed.

'Permit me,' said he, laying his hand on the shoulder of Jeremiah, who stopped and released his victim. 'Thank you. Excuse me. Husband and wife I know, from this playfulness. Haha! Always agreeable to see that relation playfully maintained. Listen! May I suggest that somebody upstairs, in the dark, is becoming energetically curious to know what is going on here?'

This reference to Mrs Clennam's voice reminded Mr Flintwinch to step into the hall and call up the staircase. 'It's all right, I am here, Affery is coming with your light.' Then he said to the latter flustered woman, who was putting her cap on, 'Get out with you, and get upstairs!' and then turned to the stranger and said to him, 'Now, sir, what might you please to want?'

'I am afraid,' said the stranger, 'I must be so troublesome as to propose a candle.'

'True,' assented Jeremiah. 'I was going to do so. Please to stand where you are while I get one.'

The visitor was standing in the doorway, but turned a little into the gloom of the house as Mr Flintwinch turned, and pursued him with his eyes into the little room, where he groped about for a phosphorus box. When he found it, it was damp, or otherwise out of order; and match after match that he struck into it lighted sufficiently to throw a dull glare about his groping face, and to sprinkle his hands with pale little spots of fire, but not sufficiently to light the candle. The stranger, taking advantage of this fitful illumination of his visage, looked intently and wonderingly at him. Jeremiah, when he at last lighted the candle, knew he had been doing this, by seeing the last shade of a lowering watchfulness clear away from his face, as it broke into the doubtful smile that was a large ingredient in its expression.

'Be so good,' said Jeremiah, closing the house door, and taking a pretty sharp survey of the smiling visitor in his turn, 'as to step into my countinghouse.It's all right, I tell you!' petulantly breaking off to answer the voice upstairs, still unsatisfied, though Affery was there, speaking in persuasive tones. 'Don't I tell you it's all right? Preserve the woman, has she no reason at all in her!'

'Timorous,' remarked the stranger.

'Timorous?' said Mr Flintwinch, turning his head to retort, as he went before with the candle. 'More courageous than ninety men in a hundred, sir, let me tell you.'

'Though an invalid?'

'Many years an invalid. Mrs Clennam. The only one of that name left in the House now. My partner.' Saying something apologetically as he crossed the hall, to the effect that at that time of night they were not in the habit of receiving any one, and were always shut up, Mr Flintwinch led the way into his own office, which presented a sufficiently businesslike appearance. Here he put the light on his desk, and said to the stranger, with his wryest twist upon him, 'Your commands.'

'MY name is Blandois.'

'Blandois. I don't know it,' said Jeremiah.

'I thought it possible,' resumed the other, 'that you might have been advised from Paris'

'We have had no advice from Paris respecting anybody of the name of Blandois,' said Jeremiah.

'No?'

'No.'

Jeremiah stood in his favourite attitude. The smiling Mr Blandois, opening his cloak to get his hand to a breastpocket, paused to say, with a laugh in his glittering eyes, which it occurred to Mr Flintwinch were too near together:

'You are so like a friend of mine! Not so identically the same as I supposed when I really did for the moment take you to be the same in the duskfor which I ought to apologise; permit me to do so; a readiness to confess my errors is, I hope, a part of the frankness of my characterstill, however, uncommonly like.'

'Indeed?' said Jeremiah, perversely. 'But I have not received any letter of advice from anywhere respecting anybody of the name of Blandois.'

'Just so,' said the stranger.

'JUST so,' said Jeremiah.

Mr Blandois, not at all put out by this omission on the part of the correspondents of the house of Clennam and Co., took his pocketbook from his breastpocket, selected a letter from that receptacle, and handed it to Mr Flintwinch. 'No doubt you are well acquainted with the writing. Perhaps the letter speaks for itself, and requires no advice. You are a far more competent judge of such affairs than I am. It is my misfortune to be, not so much a man of business, as what the world calls (arbitrarily) a gentleman.'

Mr Flintwinch took the letter, and read, under date of Paris, 'We have to present to you, on behalf of a highly esteemed correspondent of our Firm, M. Blandois, of this city,' &c. &c. 'Such facilities as he may require and such attentions as may lie in your power,' &c. &c. 'Also have to add that if you will honour M. Blandois' drafts at sight to the extent of, say Fifty Pounds sterling (150),' &c. &c.

'Very good, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch. 'Take a chair. To the extent of anything that our House can dowe are in a retired, oldfashioned, steady way of business, sirwe shall be happy to render you our best assistance. I observe, from the date of this, that we could not yet be advised of it. Probably you came over with the delayed mail that brings the advice.'

'That I came over with the delayed mail, sir,' returned Mr Blandois, passing his white hand down his highhooked nose, 'I know to the cost of my head and stomach: the detestable and intolerable weather having racked them both. You

see me in the plight in which I came out of the packet within this halfhour. I ought to have been here hours ago, and then I should not have to apologisepermit me to apologisefor presenting myself so unreasonably, and frighteningno, bythebye, you said not frightening; permit me to apologise againthe esteemed lady, Mrs Clennam, in her invalid chamber above stairs.'

Swagger and an air of authorised condescension do so much, that Mr Flintwinch had already begun to think this a highly gentlemanly personage. Not the less unyielding with him on that account, he scraped his chin and said, what could he have the honour of doing for Mr Blandois tonight, out of business hours?

'Faith!' returned that gentleman, shrugging his cloaked shoulders, 'I must change, and eat and drink, and be lodged somewhere. Have the kindness to advise me, a total stranger, where, and money is a matter of perfect indifference until tomorrow. The nearer the place, the better. Next door, if that's all.'

Mr Flintwinch was slowly beginning, 'For a gentleman of your habits, there is not in this immediate neighbourhood any hotel' when Mr Blandois took him up.

'So much for my habits! my dear sir,' snapping his fingers. 'A citizen of the world has no habits. That I am, in my poor way, a gentleman, by Heaven! I will not deny, but I have no unaccommodating prejudiced habits. A clean room, a hot dish for dinner, and a bottle of not absolutely poisonous wine, are all I want tonight. But I want that much without the trouble of going one unnecessary inch to get it.'

'There is,' said Mr Flintwinch, with more than his usual deliberation, as he met, for a moment, Mr Blandois' shining eyes, which were restless; 'there is a coffeehouse and tavern close here, which, so far, I can recommend; but there's no style about it.'

'I dispense with style!' said Mr Blandois, waving his hand. 'Do me the honour to show me the house, and introduce me there (if I am not too troublesome), and I shall be infinitely obliged.' Mr Flintwinch, upon this, looked up his hat, and lighted Mr Blandois across the hall again. As he put the candle on a bracket, where the dark old panelling almost served as an extinguisher for it, he bethought himself of going up to tell the invalid that he would not be absent five minutes. 'Oblige me,' said the visitor, on his saying so, 'by presenting my card of visit. Do me the favour to add that I shall be happy to wait on Mrs Clennam, to offer my personal compliments, and to apologise for having occasioned any agitation in this tranquil corner, if it should suit her

convenience to endure the presence of a stranger for a few minutes, after he shall have changed his wet clothes and fortified himself with something to eat and drink.'

Jeremiah made all despatch, and said, on his return, 'She'll be glad to see you, sir; but, being conscious that her sick room has no attractions, wishes me to say that she won't hold you to your offer, in case you should think better of it.'

'To think better of it,' returned the gallant Blandois, 'would be to slight a lady; to slight a lady would be to be deficient in chivalry towards the sex; and chivalry towards the sex is a part of my character!' Thus expressing himself, he threw the draggled skirt of his cloak over his shoulder, and accompanied Mr Flintwinch to the tavern; taking up on the road a porter who was waiting with his portmanteau on the outer side of the gateway.

The house was kept in a homely manner, and the condescension of Mr Blandois was infinite. It seemed to fill to inconvenience the little bar in which the widow landlady and her two daughters received him; it was much too big for the narrow wainscoted room with a bagatelleboard in it, that was first proposed for his reception; it perfectly swamped the little private holiday sittingroom of the family, which was finally given up to him. Here, in dry clothes and scented linen, with sleeked hair, a great ring on each forefinger and a massive show of watchchain, Mr Blandois waiting for his dinner, lolling on a windowseat with his knees drawn up, looked (for all the difference in the setting of the jewel) fearfully and wonderfully like a certain Monsieur Rigaud who had once so waited for his breakfast, lying on the stone ledge of the iron grating of a cell in a villainous dungeon at Marseilles.

His greed at dinner, too, was closely in keeping with the greed of Monsieur Rigaud at breakfast. His avaricious manner of collecting all the eatables about him, and devouring some with his eyes while devouring others with his jaws, was the same manner. His utter disregard of other people, as shown in his way of tossing the little womanly toys of furniture about, flinging favourite cushions under his boots for a softer rest, and crushing delicate coverings with his big body and his great black head, had the same brute selfishness at the bottom of it. The softly moving hands that were so busy among the dishes had the old wicked facility of the hands that had clung to the bars. And when he could eat no more, and sat sucking his delicate fingers one by one and wiping them on a cloth, there wanted nothing but the substitution of vineleaves to finish the picture.

On this man, with his moustache going up and his nose coming down in that most evil of smiles, and with his surface eyes looking as if they belonged to his dyed hair, and had had their natural power of reflecting light stopped by some similar process, Nature, always true, and never working in vain, had set

the mark, Beware! It was not her fault, if the warning were fruitless. She is never to blame in any such instance.

Mr Blandois, having finished his repast and cleaned his fingers, took a cigar from his pocket, and, lying on the windowseat again, smoked it out at his leisure, occasionally apostrophising the smoke as it parted from his thin lips in a thin stream:

'Blandois, you shall turn the tables on society, my little child. Haha! Holy blue, you have begun well, Blandois! At a pinch, an excellent master in English or French; a man for the bosom of families! You have a quick perception, you have humour, you have ease, you have insinuating manners, you have a good appearance; in effect, you are a gentleman! A gentleman you shall live, my small boy, and a gentleman you shall die. You shall win, however the game goes. They shall all confess your merit, Blandois. You shall subdue the society which has grievously wronged you, to your own high spirit. Death of my soul! You are high spirited by right and by nature, my Blandois!'

To such soothing murmurs did this gentleman smoke out his cigar and drink out his bottle of wine. Both being finished, he shook himself into a sitting attitude; and with the concluding serious apostrophe, 'Hold, then! Blandois, you ingenious one, have all your wits about you!' arose and went back to the house of Clennam and Co.

He was received at the door by Mistress Affery, who, under instructions from her lord, had lighted up two candles in the hall and a third on the staircase, and who conducted him to Mrs Clennam's room. Tea was prepared there, and such little company arrangements had been made as usually attended the reception of expected visitors. They were slight on the greatest occasion, never extending beyond the production of the China teaservice, and the covering of the bed with a sober and sad drapery. For the rest, there was the bierlike sofa with the block upon it, and the figure in the widow's dress, as if attired for execution; the fire topped by the mound of damped ashes; the grate with its second little mound of ashes; the kettle and the smell of black dye; all as they had been for fifteen years.

Mr Flintwinch presented the gentleman commended to the consideration of Clennam and Co. Mrs Clennam, who had the letter lying before her, bent her head and requested him to sit. They looked very closely at one another. That was but natural curiosity. 'I thank you, sir, for thinking of a disabled woman like me. Few who come here on business have any remembrance to bestow on one so removed from observation. It would be idle to expect that they should have. Out of sight, out of mind. While I am grateful for the exception, I don't complain of the rule.'

Mr Blandois, in his most gentlemanly manner, was afraid he had disturbed her by unhappily presenting himself at such an unconscionable time. For which he had already offered his best apologies to Mrhe begged pardonbut by name had not the distinguished honour'Mr Flintwinch has been connected with the House many years.'

Mr Blandois was Mr Flintwinch's most obedient humble servant. He entreated Mr Flintwinch to receive the assurance of his profoundest consideration.

'My husband being dead,' said Mrs Clennam, 'and my son preferring another pursuit, our old House has no other representative in these days than Mr Flintwinch.'

'What do you call yourself?' was the surly demand of that gentleman. 'You have the head of two men.'

'My sex disqualifies me,' she proceeded with merely a slight turn of her eyes in jeremiah's direction, 'from taking a responsible part in the business, even if I had the ability; and therefore Mr Flintwinch combines my interest with his own, and conducts it. It is not what it used to be; but some of our old friends (principally the writers of this letter) have the kindness not to forget us, and we retain the power of doing what they entrust to us as efficiently as we ever did. This however is not interesting to you. You are English, sir?'

'Faith, madam, no; I am neither born nor bred in England. In effect, I am of no country,' said Mr Blandois, stretching out his leg and smiting it: 'I descend from halfadozen countries.'

'You have been much about the world?'

'It is true. By Heaven, madam, I have been here and there and everywhere!'

'You have no ties, probably. Are not married?'

'Madam,' said Mr Blandois, with an ugly fall of his eyebrows, 'I adore your sex, but I am not marriednever was.'

Mistress Affery, who stood at the table near him, pouring out the tea, happened in her dreamy state to look at him as he said these words, and to fancy that she caught an expression in his eyes which attracted her own eyes so that she could not get them away. The effect of this fancy was to keep her staring at him with the teapot in her hand, not only to her own great uneasiness, but manifestly to his, too; and, through them both, to Mrs Clennam's and Mr Flintwinch's. Thus a few ghostly moments supervened, when they were all confusedly staring without knowing why.

'Affery,' her mistress was the first to say, 'what is the matter with you?'

'I don't know,' said Mistress Affery, with her disengaged left hand extended towards the visitor. 'It ain't me. It's him!'

'What does this good woman mean?' cried Mr Blandois, turning white, hot, and slowly rising with a look of such deadly wrath that it contrasted surprisingly with the slight force of his words. 'How is it possible to understand this good creature?'

'It's NOT possible,' said Mr Flintwinch, screwing himself rapidly in that direction. 'She don't know what she means. She's an idiot, a wanderer in her mind. She shall have a dose, she shall have such a dose! Get along with you, my woman,' he added in her ear, 'get along with you, while you know you're Affery, and before you're shaken to yeast.'

Mistress Affery, sensible of the danger in which her identity stood, relinquished the teapot as her husband seized it, put her apron over her head, and in a twinkling vanished. The visitor gradually broke into a smile, and sat down again.

'You'll excuse her, Mr Blandois,' said Jeremiah, pouring out the tea himself, 'she's failing and breaking up; that's what she's about. Do you take sugar, sir?'

'Thank you, no tea for me.Pardon my observing it, but that's a very remarkable watch!'

The teatable was drawn up near the sofa, with a small interval between it and Mrs Clennam's own particular table. Mr Blandois in his gallantry had risen to hand that lady her tea (her dish of toast was already there), and it was in placing the cup conveniently within her reach that the watch, lying before her as it always did, attracted his attention. Mrs Clennam looked suddenly up at him.

'May I be permitted? Thank you. A fine oldfashioned watch,' he said, taking it in his hand. 'Heavy for use, but massive and genuine. I have a partiality for everything genuine. Such as I am, I am genuine myself. Hah! A gentleman's watch with two cases in the old fashion. May I remove it from the outer case? Thank you. Aye? An old silk watchlining, worked with beads! I have often seen these among old Dutch people and Belgians. Quaint things!'

'They are oldfashioned, too,' said Mrs Clennam. 'Very. But this is not so old as the watch, I think?'

'I think not.'

'Extraordinary how they used to complicate these cyphers!' remarked Mr Blandois, glancing up with his own smile again. 'Now is this D. N. F.? It might be almost anything.'

'Those are the letters.'

Mr Flintwinch, who had been observantly pausing all this time with a cup of tea in his hand, and his mouth open ready to swallow the contents, began to do so: always entirely filling his mouth before he emptied it at a gulp; and always deliberating again before he refilled it.

'D. N. F. was some tender, lovely, fascinating faircreature, I make no doubt,' observed Mr Blandois, as he snapped on the case again. 'I adore her memory on the assumption. Unfortunately for my peace of mind, I adore but too readily. It may be a vice, it may be a virtue, but adoration of female beauty and merit constitutes three parts of my character, madam.'

Mr Flintwinch had by this time poured himself out another cup of tea, which he was swallowing in gulps as before, with his eyes directed to the invalid.

'You may be heartfree here, sir,' she returned to Mr Blandois. 'Those letters are not intended, I believe, for the initials of any name.'

'Of a motto, perhaps,' said Mr Blandois, casually.

'Of a sentence. They have always stood, I believe, for Do Not Forget!'

'And naturally,' said Mr Blandois, replacing the watch and stepping backward to his former chair, 'you do not forget.'

Mr Flintwinch, finishing his tea, not only took a longer gulp than he had taken yet, but made his succeeding pause under new circumstances: that is to say, with his head thrown back and his cup held still at his lips, while his eyes were still directed at the invalid. She had that force of face, and that concentrated air of collecting her firmness or obstinacy, which represented in her case what would have been gesture and action in another, as she replied with her deliberate strength of speech: 'No, sir, I do not forget. To lead a life as monotonous as mine has been during many years, is not the way to forget. To lead a life of selfcorrection is not the way to forget. To be sensible of having (as we all have, every one of us, all the children of Adam!) offences to expiate and peace to make, does not justify the desire to forget. Therefore I have long dismissed it, and I neither forget nor wish to forget.'

Mr Flintwinch, who had latterly been shaking the sediment at the bottom of his teacup, round and round, here gulped it down, and putting the cup in the teatray, as done with, turned his eyes upon Mr Blandois as if to ask him what he thought of that?

'All expressed, madam,' said Mr Blandois, with his smoothest bow and his white hand on his breast, 'by the word "naturally," which I am proud to have had sufficient apprehension and appreciation (but without appreciation I could

not be Blandois) to employ.'

'Pardon me, sir,' she returned, 'if I doubt the likelihood of a gentleman of pleasure, and change, and politeness, accustomed to court and to be courted'

'Oh madam! By Heaven!'

'If I doubt the likelihood of such a character quite comprehending what belongs to mine in my circumstances. Not to obtrude doctrine upon you,' she looked at the rigid pile of hard pale books before her, '(for you go your own way, and the consequences are on your own head), I will say this much: that I shape my course by pilots, strictly by proved and tried pilots, under whom I cannot be shipwreckedcan not beand that if I were unmindful of the admonition conveyed in those three letters, I should not be half as chastened as I am.'

It was curious how she seized the occasion to argue with some invisible opponent. Perhaps with her own better sense, always turning upon herself and her own deception.

'If I forgot my ignorances in my life of health and freedom, I might complain of the life to which I am now condemned. I never do; I never have done. If I forgot that this scene, the Earth, is expressly meant to be a scene of gloom, and hardship, and dark trial, for the creatures who are made out of its dust, I might have some tenderness for its vanities. But I have no such tenderness. If I did not know that we are, every one, the subject (most justly the subject) of a wrath that must be satisfied, and against which mere actions are nothing, I might repine at the difference between me, imprisoned here, and the people who pass that gateway yonder. But I take it as a grace and favour to be elected to make the satisfaction I am making here, to know what I know for certain here, and to work out what I have worked out here. My affliction might otherwise have had no meaning to me. Hence I would forget, and I do forget, nothing. Hence I am contented, and say it is better with me than with millions.' As she spoke these words, she put her hand upon the watch, and restored it to the precise spot on her little table which it always occupied. With her touch lingering upon it, she sat for some moments afterwards, looking at it steadily and halfdefiantly.

Mr Blandois, during this exposition, had been strictly attentive, keeping his eyes fastened on the lady, and thoughtfully stroking his moustache with his two hands. Mr Flintwinch had been a little fidgety, and now struck in.

'There, there, there!' said he. 'That is quite understood, Mrs Clennam, and you have spoken piously and well. Mr Blandois, I suspect, is not of a pious cast.' 'On the contrary, sir!' that gentleman protested, snapping his fingers. 'Your pardon! It's a part of my character. I am sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and

imaginative. A sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative man, Mr Flintwinch, must be that, or nothing!'

There was an inkling of suspicion in Mr Flintwinch's face that he might be nothing, as he swaggered out of his chair (it was characteristic of this man, as it is of all men similarly marked, that whatever he did, he overdid, though it were sometimes by only a hairsbreadth), and approached to take his leave of Mrs Clennam.

'With what will appear to you the egotism of a sick old woman, sir,' she then said, 'though really through your accidental allusion, I have been led away into the subject of myself and my infirmities. Being so considerate as to visit me, I hope you will be likewise so considerate as to overlook that. Don't compliment me, if you please.' For he was evidently going to do it. 'Mr Flintwinch will be happy to render you any service, and I hope your stay in this city may prove agreeable.'

Mr Blandois thanked her, and kissed his hand several times. 'This is an old room,' he remarked, with a sudden sprightliness of manner, looking round when he got near the door, 'I have been so interested that I have not observed it. But it's a genuine old room.'

'It is a genuine old house,' said Mrs Clennam, with her frozen smile. 'A place of no pretensions, but a piece of antiquity.'

'Faith!' cried the visitor. 'If Mr Flintwinch would do me the favour to take me through the rooms on my way out, he could hardly oblige me more. An old house is a weakness with me. I have many weaknesses, but none greater. I love and study the picturesque in all its varieties. I have been called picturesque myself. It is no merit to be picturesqueI have greater merits, perhapsbut I may be, by an accident. Sympathy, sympathy!'

'I tell you beforehand, Mr Blandois, that you'll find it very dingy and very bare,' said Jeremiah, taking up the candle. 'It's not worth your looking at.'But Mr Blandois, smiting him in a friendly manner on the back, only laughed; so the said Blandois kissed his hand again to Mrs Clennam, and they went out of the room together.

'You don't care to go upstairs?' said Jeremiah, on the landing. 'On the contrary, Mr Flintwinch; if not tiresome to you, I shall be ravished!'

Mr Flintwinch, therefore, wormed himself up the staircase, and Mr Blandois followed close. They ascended to the great garret bedroom which Arthur had occupied on the night of his return. 'There, Mr Blandois!' said Jeremiah, showing it, 'I hope you may think that worth coming so high to see. I confess I don't.'

Mr Blandois being enraptured, they walked through other garrets and passages, and came down the staircase again. By this time Mr Flintwinch had remarked that he never found the visitor looking at any room, after throwing one quick glance around, but always found the visitor looking at him, Mr Flintwinch. With this discovery in his thoughts, he turned about on the staircase for another experiment. He met his eyes directly; and on the instant of their fixing one another, the visitor, with that ugly play of nose and moustache, laughed (as he had done at every similar moment since they left Mrs Clennam's chamber) a diabolically silent laugh.

As a much shorter man than the visitor, Mr Flintwinch was at the physical disadvantage of being thus disagreeably leered at from a height; and as he went first down the staircase, and was usually a step or two lower than the other, this disadvantage was at the time increased. He postponed looking at Mr Blandois again until this accidental inequality was removed by their having entered the late Mr Clennam's room. But, then twisting himself suddenly round upon him, he found his look unchanged.

'A most admirable old house,' smiled Mr Blandois. 'So mysterious. Do you never hear any haunted noises here?'

'Noises,' returned Mr Flintwinch. 'No.'

'Nor see any devils?'

'Not,' said Mr Flintwinch, grimly screwing himself at his questioner, 'not any that introduce themselves under that name and in that capacity.'

'Haha! A portrait here, I see.'

(Still looking at Mr Flintwinch, as if he were the portrait.)

'It's a portrait, sir, as you observe.'

'May I ask the subject, Mr Flintwinch?'

'Mr Clennam, deceased. Her husband.' 'Former owner of the remarkable watch, perhaps?' said the visitor.

Mr Flintwinch, who had cast his eyes towards the portrait, twisted himself about again, and again found himself the subject of the same look and smile. 'Yes, Mr Blandois,' he replied tartly. 'It was his, and his uncle's before him, and Lord knows who before him; and that's all I can tell you of its pedigree.'

'That's a strongly marked character, Mr Flintwinch, our friend upstairs.'

'Yes, sir,' said Jeremiah, twisting himself at the visitor again, as he did during the whole of this dialogue, like some screwmachine that fell short of its grip;

for the other never changed, and he always felt obliged to retreat a little. 'She is a remarkable woman. Great fortitudegreat strength of mind.'

'They must have been very happy,' said Blandois.

'Who?' demanded Mr Flintwinch, with another screw at him.

Mr Blandois shook his right forefinger towards the sick room, and his left forefinger towards the portrait, and then, putting his arms akimbo and striding his legs wide apart, stood smiling down at Mr Flintwinch with the advancing nose and the retreating moustache.

'As happy as most other married people, I suppose,' returned Mr Flintwinch. 'I can't say. I don't know. There are secrets in all families.'

'Secrets!' cried Mr Blandois, quickly. 'Say it again, my son.'

'I say,' replied Mr Flintwinch, upon whom he had swelled himself so suddenly that Mr Flintwinch found his face almost brushed by the dilated chest. 'I say there are secrets in all families.'

'So there are,' cried the other, clapping him on both shoulders, and rolling him backwards and forwards. 'Haha! you are right. So there are! Secrets! Holy Blue! There are the devil's own secrets in some families, Mr Flintwinch!' With that, after clapping Mr Flintwinch on both shoulders several times, as if in a friendly and humorous way he were rallying him on a joke he had made, he threw up his arms, threw back his head, hooked his hands together behind it, and burst into a roar of laughter. It was in vain for Mr Flintwinch to try another screw at him. He had his laugh out.

'But, favour me with the candle a moment,' he said, when he had done. 'Let us have a look at the husband of the remarkable lady. Hah!' holding up the light at arm's length. 'A decided expression of face here too, though not of the same character. Looks as if he were saying, what is itDo Not Forgetdoes he not, Mr Flintwinch?

By Heaven, sir, he does!'

As he returned the candle, he looked at him once more; and then, leisurely strolling out with him into the hall, declared it to be a charming old house indeed, and one which had so greatly pleased him that he would not have missed inspecting it for a hundred pounds. Throughout these singular freedoms on the part of Mr Blandois, which involved a general alteration in his demeanour, making it much coarser and rougher, much more violent and audacious than before, Mr Flintwinch, whose leathern face was not liable to many changes, preserved its immobility intact. Beyond now appearing perhaps, to have been left hanging a trifle too long before that friendly

operation of cutting down, he outwardly maintained an equable composure. They had brought their survey to a close in the little room at the side of the hall, and he stood there, eyeing Mr Blandois.

'I am glad you are so well satisfied, sir,' was his calm remark. 'I didn't expect it. You seem to be quite in good spirits.'

'In admirable spirits,' returned Blandois. 'Word of honour! never more refreshed in spirits. Do you ever have presentiments, Mr Flintwinch?'

'I am not sure that I know what you mean by the term, sir,' replied that gentleman.

'Say, in this case, Mr Flintwinch, undefined anticipations of pleasure to come.'

'I can't say I'm sensible of such a sensation at present,' returned Mr Flintwinch with the utmost gravity. 'If I should find it coming on, I'll mention it.'

'Now I,' said Blandois, 'I, my son, have a presentiment tonight that we shall be well acquainted. Do you find it coming on?'

'Nno,' returned Mr Flintwinch, deliberately inquiring of himself. 'I can't say I do.'

'I have a strong presentiment that we shall become intimately acquainted.You have no feeling of that sort yet?'

'Not yet,' said Mr Flintwinch.

Mr Blandois, taking him by both shoulders again, rolled him about a little in his former merry way, then drew his arm through his own, and invited him to come off and drink a bottle of wine like a dear deep old dog as he was.

Without a moment's indecision, Mr Flintwinch accepted the invitation, and they went out to the quarters where the traveller was lodged, through a heavy rain which had rattled on the windows, roofs, and pavements, ever since nightfall. The thunder and lightning had long ago passed over, but the rain was furious. On their arrival at Mr Blandois' room, a bottle of port wine was ordered by that gallant gentleman; who (crushing every pretty thing he could collect, in the soft disposition of his dainty figure) coiled himself upon the windowseat, while Mr Flintwinch took a chair opposite to him, with the table between them. Mr Blandois proposed having the largest glasses in the house, to which Mr Flintwinch assented. The bumpers filled, Mr Blandois, with a roystering gaiety, clinked the top of his glass against the bottom of Mr Flintwinch's, and the bottom of his glass against the top of Mr Flintwinch's, and drank to the intimate acquaintance he foresaw.

Mr Flintwinch gravely pledged him, and drank all the wine he could get, and

said nothing. As often as Mr Blandois clinked glasses (which was at every replenishment), Mr Flintwinch stolidly did his part of the clinking, and would have stolidly done his companion's part of the wine as well as his own: being, except in the article of palate, a mere cask.

In short, Mr Blandois found that to pour port wine into the reticent Flintwinch was, not to open him but to shut him up. Moreover, he had the appearance of a perfect ability to go on all night; or, if occasion were, all next day and all next night; whereas Mr Blandois soon grew indistinctly conscious of swaggering too fiercely and boastfully. He therefore terminated the entertainment at the end of the third bottle.

'You will draw upon us tomorrow, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch, with a businesslike face at parting.

'My Cabbage,' returned the other, taking him by the collar with both hands, 'I'll draw upon you; have no fear. Adieu, my Flintwinch. Receive at parting;' here he gave him a southern embrace, and kissed him soundly on both cheeks; 'the word of a gentleman! By a thousand Thunders, you shall see me again!'

He did not present himself next day, though the letter of advice came duly to hand. Inquiring after him at night, Mr Flintwinch found, with surprise, that he had paid his bill and gone back to the Continent by way of Calais. Nevertheless, Jeremiah scraped out of his cogitating face a lively conviction that Mr Blandois would keep his word on this occasion, and would be seen again.

CHAPTER 31.

Spirit

Anybody may pass, any day, in the thronged thoroughfares of the metropolis, some meagre, wrinkled, yellow old man (who might be supposed to have dropped from the stars, if there were any star in the Heavens dull enough to be suspected of casting off so feeble a spark), creeping along with a scared air, as though bewildered and a little frightened by the noise and bustle. This old man is always a little old man. If he were ever a big old man, he has shrunk into a little old man; if he were always a little old man, he has dwindled into a less old man. His coat is a colour, and cut, that never was the mode anywhere, at any period. Clearly, it was not made for him, or for any individual mortal. Some wholesale contractor measured Fate for five thousand coats of such quality, and Fate has lent this old coat to this old man, as one of a long

unfinished line of many old men. It has always large dull metal buttons, similar to no other buttons. This old man wears a hat, a thumbed and napless and yet an obdurate hat, which has never adapted itself to the shape of his poor head. His coarse shirt and his coarse neckcloth have no more individuality than his coat and hat; they have the same character of not being hisof not being anybody's. Yet this old man wears these clothes with a certain unaccustomed air of being dressed and elaborated for the public ways; as though he passed the greater part of his time in a nightcap and gown. And so, like the country mouse in the second year of a famine, come to see the town mouse, and timidly threading his way to the townmouse's lodging through a city of cats, this old man passes in the streets.

Sometimes, on holidays towards evening, he will be seen to walk with a slightly increased infirmity, and his old eyes will glimmer with a moist and marshy light. Then the little old man is drunk. A very small measure will overset him; he may be bowled off his unsteady legs with a halfpint pot. Some pitying acquaintancechance acquaintance very oftenhas warmed up his weakness with a treat of beer, and the consequence will be the lapse of a longer time than usual before he shall pass again. For the little old man is going home to the Workhouse; and on his good behaviour they do not let him out often (though methinks they might, considering the few years he has before him to go out in, under the sun); and on his bad behaviour they shut him up closer than ever in a grove of two score and nineteen more old men, every one of whom smells of all the others.

Mrs Plornish's father,a poor little reedy piping old gentleman, like a wornout bird; who had been in what he called the musicbinding business, and met with great misfortunes, and who had seldom been able to make his way, or to see it or to pay it, or to do anything at all with it but find it no thoroughfare,had retired of his own accord to the Workhouse which was appointed by law to be the Good Samaritan of his district (without the twopence, which was bad political economy), on the settlement of that execution which had carried Mr Plornish to the Marshalsea College. Previous to his soninlaw's difficulties coming to that head, Old Nandy (he was always so called in his legal Retreat, but he was Old Mr Nandy among the Bleeding Hearts) had sat in a corner of the Plornish fireside, and taken his bite and sup out of the Plornish cupboard. He still hoped to resume that domestic position when Fortune should smile upon his soninlaw; in the meantime, while she preserved an immovable countenance, he was, and resolved to remain, one of these little old men in a grove of little old men with a community of flavour.

But no poverty in him, and no coat on him that never was the mode, and no Old Men's Ward for his dwellingplace, could quench his daughter's admiration. Mrs Plornish was as proud of her father's talents as she could

possibly have been if they had made him Lord Chancellor. She had as firm a belief in the sweetness and propriety of his manners as she could possibly have had if he had been Lord Chamberlain. The poor little old man knew some pale and vapid little songs, long out of date, about Chloe, and Phyllis, and Strephon being wounded by the son of Venus; and for Mrs Plornish there was no such music at the Opera as the small internal flutterings and chirpings wherein he would discharge himself of these ditties, like a weak, little, broken barrelorgan, ground by a baby. On his 'days out,' those flecks of light in his flat vista of pollard old men,' it was at once Mrs Plornish's delight and sorrow, when he was strong with meat, and had taken his full halfpennyworth of porter, to say, 'Sing us a song, Father.' Then he would give them Chloe, and if he were in pretty good spirits, Phyllis alsoStrephon he had hardly been up to since he went into retirementand then would Mrs Plornish declare she did believe there never was such a singer as Father, and wipe her eyes.

If he had come from Court on these occasions, nay, if he had been the noble Refrigerator come home triumphantly from a foreign court to be presented and promoted on his last tremendous failure, Mrs Plornish could not have handed him with greater elevation about Bleeding Heart Yard. 'Here's Father,' she would say, presenting him to a neighbour. 'Father will soon be home with us for good, now. Ain't Father looking well? Father's a sweeter singer than ever; you'd never have forgotten it, if you'd aheard him just now.'

As to Mr Plornish, he had married these articles of belief in marrying Mr Nandy's daughter, and only wondered how it was that so gifted an old gentleman had not made a fortune. This he attributed, after much reflection, to his musical genius not having been scientifically developed in his youth. 'For why,' argued Mr Plornish, 'why go abinding music when you've got it in yourself? That's where it is, I consider.'

Old Nandy had a patron: one patron. He had a patron who in a certain sumptuous wayan apologetic way, as if he constantly took an admiring audience to witness that he really could not help being more free with this old fellow than they might have expected, on account of his simplicity and povertywas mightily good to him. Old Nandy had been several times to the Marshalsea College, communicating with his soninlaw during his short durance there; and had happily acquired to himself, and had by degrees and in course of time much improved, the patronage of the Father of that national institution.

Mr Dorrit was in the habit of receiving this old man as if the old man held of him in vassalage under some feudal tenure. He made little treats and teas for him, as if he came in with his homage from some outlying district where the tenantry were in a primitive state.

It seemed as if there were moments when he could by no means have sworn but that the old man was an ancient retainer of his, who had been meritoriously faithful. When he mentioned him, he spoke of him casually as his old pensioner. He had a wonderful satisfaction in seeing him, and in commenting on his decayed condition after he was gone. It appeared to him amazing that he could hold up his head at all, poor creature. 'In the Workhouse, sir, the Union; no privacy, no visitors, no station, no respect, no speciality. Most deplorable!'

It was Old Nandy's birthday, and they let him out. He said nothing about its being his birthday, or they might have kept him in; for such old men should not be born. He passed along the streets as usual to Bleeding Heart Yard, and had his dinner with his daughter and soninlaw, and gave them Phyllis. He had hardly concluded, when Little Dorrit looked in to see how they all were.

'Miss Dorrit,' said Mrs Plornish, 'here's Father! Ain't he looking nice? And such voice he's in!'

Little Dorrit gave him her hand, and smilingly said she had not seen him this long time.

'No, they're rather hard on poor Father,' said Mrs Plornish with a lengthening face, 'and don't let him have half as much change and fresh air as would benefit him. But he'll soon be home for good, now. Won't you, Father?'

'Yes, my dear, I hope so. In good time, please God.'

Here Mr Plornish delivered himself of an oration which he invariably made, word for word the same, on all such opportunities.

It was couched in the following terms:

'John Edward Nandy. Sir. While there's a ounce of wittles or drink of any sort in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it. While there's a handful of fire or a mouthful of bed in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it.

If so be as there should be nothing in this present roof, you should be as welcome to your share on it as if it was something, much or little. And this is what I mean and so I don't deceive you, and consequently which is to stand out is to entreat of you, and therefore why not do it?'

To this lucid address, which Mr Plornish always delivered as if he had composed it (as no doubt he had) with enormous labour, Mrs Plornish's father pipingly replied:

'I thank you kindly, Thomas, and I know your intentions well, which is the

same I thank you kindly for. But no, Thomas. Until such times as it's not to take it out of your children's mouths, which take it is, and call it by what name you will it do remain and equally deprive, though may they come, and too soon they can not come, no Thomas, no!'

Mrs Plornish, who had been turning her face a little away with a corner of her apron in her hand, brought herself back to the conversation again by telling Miss Dorrit that Father was going over the water to pay his respects, unless she knew of any reason why it might not be agreeable.

Her answer was, 'I am going straight home, and if he will come with me I shall be so glad to take care of himso glad,' said Little Dorrit, always thoughtful of the feelings of the weak, 'of his company.'

'There, Father!' cried Mrs Plornish. 'Ain't you a gay young man to be going for a walk along with Miss Dorrit! Let me tie your neckhandkerchief into a regular good bow, for you're a regular beau yourself, Father, if ever there was one.'

With this filial joke his daughter smartened him up, and gave him a loving hug, and stood at the door with her weak child in her arms, and her strong child tumbling down the steps, looking after her little old father as he toddled away with his arm under Little Dorrit's.

They walked at a slow pace, and Little Dorrit took him by the Iron Bridge and sat him down there for a rest, and they looked over at the water and talked about the shipping, and the old man mentioned what he would do if he had a ship full of gold coming home to him (his plan was to take a noble lodging for the Plornishes and himself at a Tea Gardens, and live there all the rest of their lives, attended on by the waiter), and it was a special birthday of the old man. They were within five minutes of their destination, when, at the corner of her own street, they came upon Fanny in her new bonnet bound for the same port.

'Why, good gracious me, Amy!' cried that young lady starting. 'You never mean it!'

'Mean what, Fanny dear?'

'Well! I could have believed a great deal of you,' returned the young lady with burning indignation, 'but I don't think even I could have believed this, of even you!'

'Fanny!' cried Little Dorrit, wounded and astonished.

'Oh! Don't Fanny me, you mean little thing, don't! The idea of coming along the open streets, in the broad light of day, with a Pauper!' (firing off the last word as if it were a ball from an airgun). 'O Fanny!'

'I tell you not to Fanny me, for I'll not submit to it! I never knew such a thing. The way in which you are resolved and determined to disgrace us on all occasions, is really infamous. You bad little thing!'

'Does it disgrace anybody,' said Little Dorrit, very gently, 'to take care of this poor old man?'

'Yes, miss,' returned her sister, 'and you ought to know it does. And you do know it does, and you do it because you know it does. The principal pleasure of your life is to remind your family of their misfortunes. And the next great pleasure of your existence is to keep low company. But, however, if you have no sense of decency, I have. You'll please to allow me to go on the other side of the way, unmolested.'

With this, she bounced across to the opposite pavement. The old disgrace, who had been deferentially bowing a pace or two off (for Little Dorrit had let his arm go in her wonder, when Fanny began), and who had been hustled and cursed by impatient passengers for stopping the way, rejoined his companion, rather giddy, and said, 'I hope nothing's wrong with your honoured father, Miss? I hope there's nothing the matter in the honoured family?'

'No, no,' returned Little Dorrit. 'No, thank you. Give me your arm again, Mr Nandy. We shall soon be there now.'

So she talked to him as she had talked before, and they came to the Lodge and found Mr Chivery on the lock, and went in. Now, it happened that the Father of the Marshalsea was sauntering towards the Lodge at the moment when they were coming out of it, entering the prison arm in arm. As the spectacle of their approach met his view, he displayed the utmost agitation and despondency of mind; andaltogether regardless of Old Nandy, who, making his reverence, stood with his hat in his hand, as he always did in that gracious presenceturned about, and hurried in at his own doorway and up the staircase.

Leaving the old unfortunate, whom in an evil hour she had taken under her protection, with a hurried promise to return to him directly, Little Dorrit hastened after her father, and, on the staircase, found Fanny following her, and flouncing up with offended dignity. The three came into the room almost together; and the Father sat down in his chair, buried his face in his hands, and uttered a groan.

'Of course,' said Fanny. 'Very proper. Poor, afflicted Pa! Now, I hope you believe me, Miss?'

'What is it, father?' cried Little Dorrit, bending over him. 'Have I made you unhappy, father? Not I, I hope!'

'You hope, indeed! I dare say! Oh, you'Fanny paused for a sufficiently strong expression'you Commonminded little Amy! You complete prisonchild!'

He stopped these angry reproaches with a wave of his hand, and sobbed out, raising his face and shaking his melancholy head at his younger daughter, 'Amy, I know that you are innocent in intention. But you have cut me to the soul.' 'Innocent in intention!' the implacable Fanny struck in. 'Stuff in intention! Low in intention! Lowering of the family in intention!'

'Father!' cried Little Dorrit, pale and trembling. 'I am very sorry. Pray forgive me. Tell me how it is, that I may not do it again!'

'How it is, you prevaricating little piece of goods!' cried Fanny. 'You know how it is. I have told you already, so don't fly in the face of Providence by attempting to deny it!'

'Hush! Amy,' said the father, passing his pockethandkerchief several times across his face, and then grasping it convulsively in the hand that dropped across his knee, 'I have done what I could to keep you select here; I have done what I could to retain you a position here. I may have succeeded; I may not. You may know it; you may not. I give no opinion. I have endured everything here but humiliation. That I have happily been spareduntil this day.'

Here his convulsive grasp unclosed itself, and he put his pockethandkerchief to his eyes again. Little Dorrit, on the ground beside him, with her imploring hand upon his arm, watched him remorsefully. Coming out of his fit of grief, he clenched his pockethandkerchief once more.

'Humiliation I have happily been spared until this day. Through all my troubles there has been thatSpirit in myself, and thatthat submission to it, if I may use the term, in those about me, which has spared mehahumiliation. But this day, this minute, I have keenly felt it.'

'Of course! How could it be otherwise?' exclaimed the irrepressible Fanny. 'Careering and prancing about with a Pauper!' (airgun again).

'But, dear father,' cried Little Dorrit, 'I don't justify myself for having wounded your dear heartno! Heaven knows I don't!' She clasped her hands in quite an agony of distress. 'I do nothing but beg and pray you to be comforted and overlook it. But if I had not known that you were kind to the old man yourself, and took much notice of him, and were always glad to see him, I would not have come here with him, father, I would not, indeed. What I have been so unhappy as to do, I have done in mistake. I would not wilfully bring a tear to your eyes, dear love!' said Little Dorrit, her heart wellnigh broken, 'for anything the world could give me, or anything it could take away.'

Fanny, with a partly angry and partly repentant sob, began to cry herself, and to sayas this young lady always said when she was half in passion and half out of it, half spiteful with herself and half spiteful with everybody elsethat she wished she were dead.

The Father of the Marshalsea in the meantime took his younger daughter to his breast, and patted her head. 'There, there! Say no more, Amy, say no more, my child. I will forget it as soon as I can. I,' with hysterical cheerfulness, 'Ishall soon be able to dismiss it. It is perfectly true, my dear, that I am always glad to see my old pensioneras such, as suchand that I dohaextend as much protection and kindness to thehumthe bruised reedI trust I may so call him without improprietyas in my circumstances, I can. It is quite true that this is the case, my dear child. At the same time, I preserve in doing this, if I mayhaif I may use the expressionSpirit. Becoming Spirit. And there are some things which are,' he stopped to sob, 'irreconcilable with that, and wound thatwound it deeply.

It is not that I have seen my good Amy attentive, andhacondescending to my old pensionerit is not that that hurts me. It is, if I am to close the painful subject by being explicit, that I have seen my child, my own child, my own daughter, coming into this College out of the public streetssmiling! smiling!arm in arm withO my God, a livery!'

This reference to the coat of no cut and no time, the unfortunate gentleman gasped forth, in a scarcely audible voice, and with his clenched pockethandkerchief raised in the air. His excited feelings might have found some further painful utterance, but for a knock at the door, which had been already twice repeated, and to which Fanny (still wishing herself dead, and indeed now going so far as to add, buried) cried 'Come in!'

'Ah, Young John!' said the Father, in an altered and calmed voice. 'What is it, Young John?'

'A letter for you, sir, being left in the Lodge just this minute, and a message with it, I thought, happening to be there myself, sir, I would bring it to your room.' The speaker's attention was much distracted by the piteous spectacle of Little Dorrit at her father's feet, with her head turned away.

'Indeed, John? Thank you.'

'The letter is from Mr Clennam, sirit's the answerand the message was, sir, that Mr Clennam also sent his compliments, and word that he would do himself the pleasure of calling this afternoon, hoping to see you, and likewise,' attention more distracted than before, 'Miss Amy.'

'Oh!' As the Father glanced into the letter (there was a banknote in it), he

reddened a little, and patted Amy on the head afresh. 'Thank you, Young John. Quite right. Much obliged to you for your attention. No one waiting?'

'No, sir, no one waiting.'

'Thank you, John. How is your mother, Young John?'

'Thank you, sir, she's not quite as well as we could wishin fact, we none of us are, except fatherbut she's pretty well, sir.' 'Say we sent our remembrances, will you? Say kind remembrances, if you please, Young John.'

'Thank you, sir, I will.' And Mr Chivery junior went his way, having spontaneously composed on the spot an entirely new epitaph for himself, to the effect that Here lay the body of John Chivery, Who, Having at such a date, Beheld the idol of his life, In grief and tears, And feeling unable to bear the harrowing spectacle, Immediately repaired to the abode of his inconsolable parents, And terminated his existence by his own rash act.

'There, there, Amy!' said the Father, when Young John had closed the door, 'let us say no more about it.' The last few minutes had improved his spirits remarkably, and he was quite lightsome. 'Where is my old pensioner all this while? We must not leave him by himself any longer, or he will begin to suppose he is not welcome, and that would pain me. Will you fetch him, my child, or shall I?'

'If you wouldn't mind, father,' said Little Dorrit, trying to bring her sobbing to a close.

'Certainly I will go, my dear. I forgot; your eyes are rather red.

There! Cheer up, Amy. Don't be uneasy about me. I am quite myself again, my love, quite myself. Go to your room, Amy, and make yourself look comfortable and pleasant to receive Mr Clennam.'

'I would rather stay in my own room, Father,' returned Little Dorrit, finding it more difficult than before to regain her composure. 'I would far rather not see Mr Clennam.'

'Oh, fie, fie, my dear, that's folly. Mr Clennam is a very gentlemanly manvery gentlemanly. A little reserved at times; but I will say extremely gentlemanly. I couldn't think of your not being here to receive Mr Clennam, my dear, especially this afternoon. So go and freshen yourself up, Amy; go and freshen yourself up, like a good girl.'

Thus directed, Little Dorrit dutifully rose and obeyed: only pausing for a moment as she went out of the room, to give her sister a kiss of reconciliation. Upon which, that young lady, feeling much harassed in her mind, and having

for the time worn out the wish with which she generally relieved it, conceived and executed the brilliant idea of wishing Old Nandy dead, rather than that he should come bothering there like a disgusting, tiresome, wicked wretch, and making mischief between two sisters.

The Father of the Marshalsea, even humming a tune, and wearing his black velvet cap a little on one side, so much improved were his spirits, went down into the yard, and found his old pensioner standing there hat in hand just within the gate, as he had stood all this time. 'Come, Nandy!' said he, with great suavity. 'Come upstairs, Nandy; you know the way; why don't you come upstairs?' He went the length, on this occasion, of giving him his hand and saying, 'How are you, Nandy? Are you pretty well?' To which that vocalist returned, 'I thank you, honoured sir, I am all the better for seeing your honour.' As they went along the yard, the Father of the Marshalsea presented him to a Collegian of recent date. 'An old acquaintance of mine, sir, an old pensioner.' And then said, 'Be covered, my good Nandy; put your hat on,' with great consideration.

His patronage did not stop here; for he charged Maggy to get the tea ready, and instructed her to buy certain teacakes, fresh butter, eggs, cold ham, and shrimps: to purchase which collation he gave her a banknote for ten pounds, laying strict injunctions on her to be careful of the change. These preparations were in an advanced stage of progress, and his daughter Amy had come back with her work, when Clennam presented himself; whom he most graciously received, and besought to join their meal.

'Amy, my love, you know Mr Clennam even better than I have the happiness of doing. Fanny, my dear, you are acquainted with Mr Clennam.' Fanny acknowledged him haughtily; the position she tacitly took up in all such cases being that there was a vast conspiracy to insult the family by not understanding it, or sufficiently deferring to it, and here was one of the conspirators.

'This, Mr Clennam, you must know, is an old pensioner of mine, Old Nandy, a very faithful old man.' (He always spoke of him as an object of great antiquity, but he was two or three years younger than himself.) 'Let me see. You know Plornish, I think? I think my daughter Amy has mentioned to me that you know poor Plornish?'

'O yes!' said Arthur Clennam.

'Well, sir, this is Mrs Plornish's father.'

'Indeed? I am glad to see him.'

'You would be more glad if you knew his many good qualities, Mr Clennam.'

'I hope I shall come to know them through knowing him,' said Arthur, secretly pitying the bowed and submissive figure.

'It is a holiday with him, and he comes to see his old friends, who are always glad to see him,' observed the Father of the Marshalsea.

Then he added behind his hand, ('Union, poor old fellow. Out for the day.')

By this time Maggy, quietly assisted by her Little Mother, had spread the board, and the repast was ready. It being hot weather and the prison very close, the window was as wide open as it could be pushed. 'If Maggy will spread that newspaper on the windowsill, my dear,' remarked the Father complacently and in a half whisper to Little Dorrit, 'my old pensioner can have his tea there, while we are having ours.'

So, with a gulf between him and the good company of about a foot in width, standard measure, Mrs Plornish's father was handsomely regaled. Clennam had never seen anything like his magnanimous protection by that other Father, he of the Marshalsea; and was lost in the contemplation of its many wonders.

The most striking of these was perhaps the relishing manner in which he remarked on the pensioner's infirmities and failings, as if he were a gracious Keeper making a running commentary on the decline of the harmless animal he exhibited.

'Not ready for more ham yet, Nandy? Why, how slow you are! (His last teeth,' he explained to the company, 'are going, poor old boy.')

At another time, he said, 'No shrimps, Nandy?' and on his not instantly replying, observed, ('His hearing is becoming very defective. He'll be deaf directly.')

At another time he asked him, 'Do you walk much, Nandy, about the yard within the walls of that place of yours?'

'No, sir; no. I haven't any great liking for that.'

'No, to be sure,' he assented. 'Very natural.' Then he privately informed the circle ('Legs going.')

Once he asked the pensioner, in that general clemency which asked him anything to keep him afloat, how old his younger grandchild was?

'John Edward,' said the pensioner, slowly laying down his knife and fork to consider. 'How old, sir? Let me think now.'

The Father of the Marshalsea tapped his forehead ('Memory weak.')

'John Edward, sir? Well, I really forget. I couldn't say at this minute, sir,

whether it's two and two months, or whether it's two and five months. It's one or the other.'

'Don't distress yourself by worrying your mind about it,' he returned, with infinite forbearance. ('Faculties evidently decayingold man rusts in the life he leads!')

The more of these discoveries that he persuaded himself he made in the pensioner, the better he appeared to like him; and when he got out of his chair after tea to bid the pensioner goodbye, on his intimating that he feared, honoured sir, his time was running out, he made himself look as erect and strong as possible.

'We don't call this a shilling, Nandy, you know,' he said, putting one in his hand. 'We call it tobacco.'

'Honoured sir, I thank you. It shall buy tobacco. My thanks and duty to Miss Amy and Miss Fanny. I wish you good night, Mr Clennam.'

'And mind you don't forget us, you know, Nandy,' said the Father. 'You must come again, mind, whenever you have an afternoon. You must not come out without seeing us, or we shall be jealous. Good night, Nandy. Be very careful how you descend the stairs, Nandy; they are rather uneven and worn.' With that he stood on the landing, watching the old man down: and when he came into the room again, said, with a solemn satisfaction on him, 'A melancholy sight that, Mr Clennam, though one has the consolation of knowing that he doesn't feel it himself. The poor old fellow is a dismal wreck. Spirit broken and gonepulverisedcrushed out of him, sir, completely!'

As Clennam had a purpose in remaining, he said what he could responsive to these sentiments, and stood at the window with their enunciator, while Maggy and her Little Mother washed the teaservice and cleared it away. He noticed that his companion stood at the window with the air of an affable and accessible Sovereign, and that, when any of his people in the yard below looked up, his recognition of their salutes just stopped short of a blessing.

When Little Dorrit had her work on the table, and Maggy hers on the bedstead, Fanny fell to tying her bonnet as a preliminary to her departure. Arthur, still having his purpose, still remained. At this time the door opened, without any notice, and Mr Tip came in. He kissed Amy as she started up to meet him, nodded to Fanny, nodded to his father, gloomed on the visitor without further recognition, and sat down.

'Tip, dear,' said Little Dorrit, mildly, shocked by this, 'don't you see'

'Yes, I see, Amy. If you refer to the presence of any visitor you have hereI say,

if you refer to that,' answered Tip, jerking his head with emphasis towards his shoulder nearest Clennam, 'I see!'

'Is that all you say?'

'That's all I say. And I suppose,' added the lofty young man, after a moment's pause, 'that visitor will understand me, when I say that's all I say. In short, I suppose the visitor will understand that he hasn't used me like a gentleman.'

'I do not understand that,' observed the obnoxious personage referred to with tranquillity.

'No? Why, then, to make it clearer to you, sir, I beg to let you know that when I address what I call a properlyworded appeal, and an urgent appeal, and a delicate appeal, to an individual, for a small temporary accommodation, easily within his powereasily within his power, mind!and when that individual writes back word to me that he begs to be excused, I consider that he doesn't treat me like a gentleman.'

The Father of the Marshalsea, who had surveyed his son in silence, no sooner heard this sentiment, than he began in angry voice:

'How dare you' But his son stopped him.

'Now, don't ask me how I dare, father, because that's bosh. As to the fact of the line of conduct I choose to adopt towards the individual present, you ought to be proud of my showing a proper spirit.'

'I should think so!' cried Fanny.

'A proper spirit?' said the Father. 'Yes, a proper spirit; a becoming spirit. Is it come to this that my son teaches meMEspirit!'

'Now, don't let us bother about it, father, or have any row on the subject. I have fully made up my mind that the individual present has not treated me like a gentleman. And there's an end of it.'

'But there is not an end of it, sir,' returned the Father. 'But there shall not be an end of it. You have made up your mind? You have made up your mind?'

'Yes, I have. What's the good of keeping on like that?'

'Because,' returned the Father, in a great heat, 'you had no right to make up your mind to what is monstrous, to what ishaimmoral, to what ishumparricidal. No, Mr Clennam, I beg, sir. Don't ask me to desist; there is ahuma general principle involved here, which rises even above considerations ofhahospitality. I object to the assertion made by my son. IhaI personally repel it.'

'Why, what is it to you, father?' returned the son, over his shoulder.

'What is it to me, sir? I have ahuma spirit, sir, that will not endure it. I,' he took out his pockethandkerchief again and dabbed his face. 'I am outraged and insulted by it. Let me suppose the case that I myself may at a certain timehaor times, have made ahuman appeal, and a properlyworded appeal, and a delicate appeal, and an urgent appeal to some individual for a small temporary accommodation. Let me suppose that that accommodation could have been easily extended, and was not extended, and that that individual informed me that he begged to be excused. Am I to be told by my own son, that I therefore received treatment not due to a gentleman, and that IhaI submitted to it?'

His daughter Amy gently tried to calm him, but he would not on any account be calmed. He said his spirit was up, and wouldn't endure this.

Was he to be told that, he wished to know again, by his own son on his own hearth, to his own face? Was that humiliation to be put upon him by his own blood?

'You are putting it on yourself, father, and getting into all this injury of your own accord!' said the young gentleman morosely. 'What I have made up my mind about has nothing to do with you. What I said had nothing to do with you. Why need you go trying on other people's hats?'

'I reply it has everything to do with me,' returned the Father. 'I point out to you, sir, with indignation, thathumthehadelicacy and peculiarity of your father's position should strike you dumb, sir, if nothing else should, in laying down suchhasuch unnatural principles. Besides; if you are not filial, sir, if you discard that duty, you are at leasthumnot a Christian? Are youhaan Atheist? And is it Christian, let me ask you, to stigmatise and denounce an individual for begging to be excused this time, when the same individual mayharespond with the required accommodation next time? Is it the part of a Christian not tohumnot to try him again?' He had worked himself into quite a religious glow and fervour.

'I see precious well,' said Mr Tip, rising, 'that I shall get no sensible or fair argument here tonight, and so the best thing I can do is to cut. Good night, Amy. Don't be vexed. I am very sorry it happens here, and you here, upon my soul I am; but I can't altogether part with my spirit, even for your sake, old girl.'

With those words he put on his hat and went out, accompanied by Miss Fanny; who did not consider it spirited on her part to take leave of Clennam with any less opposing demonstration than a stare, importing that she had always known him for one of the large body of conspirators.

When they were gone, the Father of the Marshalsea was at first inclined to sink into despondency again, and would have done so, but that a gentleman opportunely came up within a minute or two to attend him to the Snuggery. It was the gentleman Clennam had seen on the night of his own accidental detention there, who had that impalpable grievance about the misappropriated Fund on which the Marshal was supposed to batten. He presented himself as deputation to escort the Father to the Chair, it being an occasion on which he had promised to preside over the assembled Collegians in the enjoyment of a little Harmony.

'Such, you see, Mr Clennam,' said the Father, 'are the incongruities of my position here. But a public duty! No man, I am sure, would more readily recognise a public duty than yourself.'

Clennam besought him not to delay a moment. 'Amy, my dear, if you can persuade Mr Clennam to stay longer, I can leave the honours of our poor apology for an establishment with confidence in your hands, and perhaps you may do something towards erasing from Mr Clennam's mind thehauntoward and unpleasant circumstance which has occurred since teatime.'

Clennam assured him that it had made no impression on his mind, and therefore required no erasure.

'My dear sir,' said the Father, with a removal of his black cap and a grasp of Clennam's hand, combining to express the safe receipt of his note and enclosure that afternoon, 'Heaven ever bless you!'

So, at last, Clennam's purpose in remaining was attained, and he could speak to Little Dorrit with nobody by. Maggy counted as nobody, and she was by.

CHAPTER 32.

More FortuneTelling

Maggy sat at her work in her great white cap with its quantity of opaque frilling hiding what profile she had (she had none to spare), and her serviceable eye brought to bear upon her occupation, on the window side of the room. What with her flapping cap, and what with her unserviceable eye, she was quite partitioned off from her Little Mother, whose seat was opposite the window. The tread and shuffle of feet on the pavement of the yard had much diminished since the taking of the Chair, the tide of Collegians having set strongly in the direction of Harmony. Some few who had no music in their

souls, or no money in their pockets, dawdled about; and the old spectacle of the visitorwife and the depressed unseasoned prisoner still lingered in corners, as broken cobwebs and such unsightly discomforts draggle in corners of other places. It was the quietest time the College knew, saving the night hours when the Collegians took the benefit of the act of sleep. The occasional rattle of applause upon the tables of the Snuggery, denoted the successful termination of a morsel of Harmony; or the responsive acceptance, by the united children, of some toast or sentiment offered to them by their Father. Occasionally, a vocal strain more sonorous than the generality informed the listener that some boastful bass was in blue water, or in the hunting field, or with the reindeer, or on the mountain, or among the heather; but the Marshal of the Marshalsea knew better, and had got him hard and fast.

As Arthur Clennam moved to sit down by the side of Little Dorrit, she trembled so that she had much ado to hold her needle. Clennam gently put his hand upon her work, and said, 'Dear Little Dorrit, let me lay it down.'

She yielded it to him, and he put it aside. Her hands were then nervously clasping together, but he took one of them. 'How seldom I have seen you lately, Little Dorrit!'

'I have been busy, sir.'

'But I heard only today,' said Clennam, 'by mere accident, of your having been with those good people close by me. Why not come to me, then?'

'II don't know. Or rather, I thought you might be busy too. You generally are now, are you not?'

He saw her trembling little form and her downcast face, and the eyes that drooped the moment they were raised to hishe saw them almost with as much concern as tenderness.

'My child, your manner is so changed!'

The trembling was now quite beyond her control. Softly withdrawing her hand, and laying it in her other hand, she sat before him with her head bent and her whole form trembling.

'My own Little Dorrit,' said Clennam, compassionately.

She burst into tears. Maggy looked round of a sudden, and stared for at least a minute; but did not interpose. Clennam waited some little while before he spoke again.

'I cannot bear,' he said then, 'to see you weep; but I hope this is a relief to an overcharged heart.'

'Yes it is, sir. Nothing but that.'

'Well, well! I feared you would think too much of what passed here just now. It is of no moment; not the least. I am only unfortunate to have come in the way. Let it go by with these tears. It is not worth one of them. One of them? Such an idle thing should be repeated, with my glad consent, fifty times a day, to save you a moment's heartache, Little Dorrit.'

She had taken courage now, and answered, far more in her usual manner, 'You are so good! But even if there was nothing else in it to be sorry for and ashamed of, it is such a bad return to you'

'Hush!' said Clennam, smiling and touching her lips with his hand. 'Forgetfulness in you who remember so many and so much, would be new indeed. Shall I remind you that I am not, and that I never was, anything but the friend whom you agreed to trust? No. You remember it, don't you?'

'I try to do so, or I should have broken the promise just now, when my mistaken brother was here. You will consider his bringingup in this place, and will not judge him hardly, poor fellow, I know!' In raising her eyes with these words, she observed his face more nearly than she had done yet, and said, with a quick change of tone, 'You have not been ill, Mr Clennam?'

'No.'

'Nor tried? Nor hurt?' she asked him, anxiously.

It fell to Clennam now, to be not quite certain how to answer. He said in reply:

'To speak the truth, I have been a little troubled, but it is over.

Do I show it so plainly? I ought to have more fortitude and selfcommand than that. I thought I had. I must learn them of you. Who could teach me better!'

He never thought that she saw in him what no one else could see. He never thought that in the whole world there were no other eyes that looked upon him with the same light and strength as hers.

'But it brings me to something that I wish to say,' he continued, 'and therefore I will not quarrel even with my own face for telling tales and being unfaithful to me. Besides, it is a privilege and pleasure to confide in my Little Dorrit. Let me confess then, that, forgetting how grave I was, and how old I was, and how the time for such things had gone by me with the many years of sameness and little happiness that made up my long life far away, without marking itthat, forgetting all this, I fancied I loved some one.'

'Do I know her, sir?' asked Little Dorrit.

'No, my child.'

'Not the lady who has been kind to me for your sake?'

'Flora. No, no. Do you think'

'I never quite thought so,' said Little Dorrit, more to herself than him. 'I did wonder at it a little.'

'Well!' said Clennam, abiding by the feeling that had fallen on him in the avenue on the night of the roses, the feeling that he was an older man, who had done with that tender part of life, 'I found out my mistake, and I thought about it a littlein short, a good dealand got wiser. Being wiser, I counted up my years and considered what I am, and looked back, and looked forward, and found that I should soon be grey. I found that I had climbed the hill, and passed the level ground upon the top, and was descending quickly.'

If he had known the sharpness of the pain he caused the patient heart, in speaking thus! While doing it, too, with the purpose of easing and serving her.

'I found that the day when any such thing would have been graceful in me, or good in me, or hopeful or happy for me or any one in connection with me, was gone, and would never shine again.'

O! If he had known, if he had known! If he could have seen the dagger in his hand, and the cruel wounds it struck in the faithful bleeding breast of his Little Dorrit!

'All that is over, and I have turned my face from it. Why do I speak of this to Little Dorrit? Why do I show you, my child, the space of years that there is between us, and recall to you that I have passed, by the amount of your whole life, the time that is present to you?'

'Because you trust me, I hope. Because you know that nothing can touch you without touching me; that nothing can make you happy or unhappy, but it must make me, who am so grateful to you, the same.'

He heard the thrill in her voice, he saw her earnest face, he saw her clear true eyes, he saw the quickened bosom that would have joyfully thrown itself before him to receive a mortal wound directed at his breast, with the dying cry, 'I love him!' and the remotest suspicion of the truth never dawned upon his mind. No. He saw the devoted little creature with her worn shoes, in her common dress, in her jailhome; a slender child in body, a strong heroine in soul; and the light of her domestic story made all else dark to him.

'For those reasons assuredly, Little Dorrit, but for another too. So far removed, so different, and so much older, I am the better fitted for your friend and

adviser. I mean, I am the more easily to be trusted; and any little constraint that you might feel with another, may vanish before me. Why have you kept so retired from me? Tell me.'

'I am better here. My place and use are here. I am much better here,' said Little Dorrit, faintly.

'So you said that day upon the bridge. I thought of it much afterwards. Have you no secret you could entrust to me, with hope and comfort, if you would!'

'Secret? No, I have no secret,' said Little Dorrit in some trouble.

They had been speaking in low voices; more because it was natural to what they said to adopt that tone, than with any care to reserve it from Maggy at her work. All of a sudden Maggy stared again, and this time spoke:

'I say! Little Mother!'

'Yes, Maggy.'

'If you an't got no secret of your own to tell him, tell him that about the Princess. She had a secret, you know.'

'The Princess had a secret?' said Clennam, in some surprise. 'What Princess was that, Maggy?'

'Lor! How you do go and bother a gal of ten,' said Maggy, 'catching the poor thing up in that way. Whoever said the Princess had a secret? I never said so.'

'I beg your pardon. I thought you did.'

'No, I didn't. How could I, when it was her as wanted to find it out? It was the little woman as had the secret, and she was always a spinning at her wheel. And so she says to her, why do you keep it there? And so the t'other one says to her, no I don't; and so the t'other one says to her, yes you do; and then they both goes to the cupboard, and there it is. And she wouldn't go into the Hospital, and so she died. You know, Little Mother; tell him that.

For it was a reg'lar good secret, that was!' cried Maggy, hugging herself.

Arthur looked at Little Dorrit for help to comprehend this, and was struck by seeing her so timid and red. But, when she told him that it was only a Fairy Tale she had one day made up for Maggy, and that there was nothing in it which she wouldn't be ashamed to tell again to anybody else, even if she could remember it, he left the subject where it was.

However, he returned to his own subject by first entreating her to see him oftener, and to remember that it was impossible to have a stronger interest in her welfare than he had, or to be more set upon promoting it than he was.

When she answered fervently, she well knew that, she never forgot it, he touched upon his second and more delicate pointthe suspicion he had formed.

'Little Dorrit,' he said, taking her hand again, and speaking lower than he had spoken yet, so that even Maggy in the small room could not hear him, 'another word. I have wanted very much to say this to you; I have tried for opportunities. Don't mind me, who, for the matter of years, might be your father or your uncle. Always think of me as quite an old man. I know that all your devotion centres in this room, and that nothing to the last will ever tempt you away from the duties you discharge here. If I were not sure of it, I should, before now, have implored you, and implored your father, to let me make some provision for you in a more suitable place. But you may have an interestI will not say, now, though even that might bemay have, at another time, an interest in some one else; an interest not incompatible with your affection here.'

She was very, very pale, and silently shook her head.

'It may be, dear Little Dorrit.'

'No. No. No.' She shook her head, after each slow repetition of the word, with an air of quiet desolation that he remembered long afterwards. The time came when he remembered it well, long afterwards, within those prison walls; within that very room.

'But, if it ever should be, tell me so, my dear child. Entrust the truth to me, point out the object of such an interest to me, and I will try with all the zeal, and honour, and friendship and respect that I feel for you, good Little Dorrit of my heart, to do you a lasting service.'

'O thank you, thank you! But, O no, O no, O no!' She said this, looking at him with her workworn hands folded together, and in the same resigned accents as before.

'I press for no confidence now. I only ask you to repose unhesitating trust in me.'

'Can I do less than that, when you are so good!'

'Then you will trust me fully? Will have no secret unhappiness, or anxiety, concealed from me?'

'Almost none.'

'And you have none now?'

She shook her head. But she was very pale.

'When I lie down tonight, and my thoughts come backas they will, for they do every night, even when I have not seen youto this sad place, I may believe that there is no grief beyond this room, now, and its usual occupants, which preys on Little Dorrit's mind?'

She seemed to catch at these wordsthat he remembered, too, long afterwardsand said, more brightly, 'Yes, Mr Clennam; yes, you may!'

The crazy staircase, usually not slow to give notice when any one was coming up or down, here creaked under a quick tread, and a further sound was heard upon it, as if a little steamengine with more steam than it knew what to do with, were working towards the room. As it approached, which it did very rapidly, it laboured with increased energy; and, after knocking at the door, it sounded as if it were stooping down and snorting in at the keyhole.

Before Maggy could open the door, Mr Pancks, opening it from without, stood without a hat and with his bare head in the wildest condition, looking at Clennam and Little Dorrit, over her shoulder.

He had a lighted cigar in his hand, and brought with him airs of ale and tobacco smoke.

'Pancks the gipsy,' he observed out of breath, 'fortunetelling.' He stood dingily smiling, and breathing hard at them, with a most curious air; as if, instead of being his proprietor's grubber, he were the triumphant proprietor of the Marshalsea, the Marshal, all the turnkeys, and all the Collegians. In his great selfsatisfaction he put his cigar to his lips (being evidently no smoker), and took such a pull at it, with his right eye shut up tight for the purpose, that he underwent a convulsion of shuddering and choking. But even in the midst of that paroxysm, he still essayed to repeat his favourite introduction of himself, 'Paancks the giipsy, fortunetelling.'

'I am spending the evening with the rest of 'em,' said Pancks. 'I've been singing. I've been taking a part in White sand and grey sand. I don't know anything about it. Never mind. I'll take any part in anything. It's all the same, if you're loud enough.'

At first Clennam supposed him to be intoxicated. But he soon perceived that though he might be a little the worse (or better) for ale, the staple of his excitement was not brewed from malt, or distilled from any grain or berry.

'How d'ye do, Miss Dorrit?' said Pancks. 'I thought you wouldn't mind my running round, and looking in for a moment. Mr Clennam I heard was here, from Mr Dorrit. How are you, Sir?'

Clennam thanked him, and said he was glad to see him so gay.

'Gay!' said Pancks. 'I'm in wonderful feather, sir. I can't stop a minute, or I shall be missed, and I don't want 'em to miss me.Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

He seemed to have an insatiate delight in appealing to her and looking at her; excitedly sticking his hair up at the same moment, like a dark species of cockatoo.

'I haven't been here half an hour. I knew Mr Dorrit was in the chair, and I said, "I'll go and support him!" I ought to be down in Bleeding Heart Yard by rights; but I can worry them tomorrow.Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

His little black eyes sparkled electrically. His very hair seemed to sparkle as he roughened it. He was in that highlycharged state that one might have expected to draw sparks and snaps from him by presenting a knuckle to any part of his figure.

'Capital company here,' said Pancks.'Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

She was half afraid of him, and irresolute what to say. He laughed, with a nod towards Clennam.

'Don't mind him, Miss Dorrit. He's one of us. We agreed that you shouldn't take on to mind me before people, but we didn't mean Mr Clennam. He's one of us. He's in it. An't you, Mr Clennam?Eh, Miss Dorrit?' The excitement of this strange creature was fast communicating itself to Clennam. Little Dorrit with amazement, saw this, and observed that they exchanged quick looks.

'I was making a remark,' said Pancks, 'but I declare I forget what it was. Oh, I know! Capital company here. I've been treating 'em all round.Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

'Very generous of you,' she returned, noticing another of the quick looks between the two.

'Not at all,' said Pancks. 'Don't mention it. I'm coming into my property, that's the fact. I can afford to be liberal. I think I'll give 'em a treat here. Tables laid in the yard. Bread in stacks. Pipes in faggots. Tobacco in hayloads. Roast beef and plumpudding for every one. Quart of double stout a head. Pint of wine too, if they like it, and the authorities give permission.Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

She was thrown into such a confusion by his manner, or rather by Clennam's growing understanding of his manner (for she looked to him after every fresh appeal and cockatoo demonstration on the part of Mr Pancks), that she only moved her lips in answer, without forming any word.

'And oh, bythebye!' said Pancks, 'you were to live to know what was behind us on that little hand of yours. And so you shall, you shall, my darling.Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

He had suddenly checked himself. Where he got all the additional black prongs from, that now flew up all over his head like the myriads of points that break out in the large change of a great firework, was a wonderful mystery.

'But I shall be missed;' he came back to that; 'and I don't want 'em to miss me. Mr Clennam, you and I made a bargain. I said you should find me stick to it. You shall find me stick to it now, sir, if you'll step out of the room a moment. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good night. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good fortune.'

He rapidly shook her by both hands, and puffed down stairs. Arthur followed him with such a hurried step, that he had very nearly tumbled over him on the last landing, and rolled him down into the yard.

'What is it, for Heaven's sake!' Arthur demanded, when they burst out there both together.

'Stop a moment, sir. Mr Rugg. Let me introduce him.' With those words he presented another man without a hat, and also with a cigar, and also surrounded with a halo of ale and tobacco smoke, which man, though not so excited as himself, was in a state which would have been akin to lunacy but for its fading into sober method when compared with the rampancy of Mr Pancks. 'Mr Clennam, Mr Rugg,' said Pancks. 'Stop a moment. Come to the pump.'

They adjourned to the pump. Mr Pancks, instantly putting his head under the spout, requested Mr Rugg to take a good strong turn at the handle. Mr Rugg complying to the letter, Mr Pancks came forth snorting and blowing to some purpose, and dried himself on his handkerchief.

'I am the clearer for that,' he gasped to Clennam standing astonished. 'But upon my soul, to hear her father making speeches in that chair, knowing what we know, and to see her up in that room in that dress, knowing what we know, is enough togive me a back, Mr Rugga little higher, sir,that'll do!'

Then and there, on that Marshalsea pavement, in the shades of evening, did Mr Pancks, of all mankind, fly over the head and shoulders of Mr Rugg of Pentonville, General Agent, Accountant, and Recoverer of Debts. Alighting on his feet, he took Clennam by the buttonhole, led him behind the pump, and pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers. Mr Rugg, also, pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers.

'Stay!' said Clennam in a whisper.'You have made a discovery.'

Mr Pancks answered, with an unction which there is no language to convey, 'We rather think so.'

'Does it implicate any one?'

'How implicate, sir?'

'In any suppression or wrong dealing of any kind?'

'Not a bit of it.'

'Thank God!' said Clennam to himself. 'Now show me.' 'You are to understand'snorted Pancks, feverishly unfolding papers, and speaking in short highpressure blasts of sentences, 'Where's the Pedigree? Where's Schedule number four, Mr Rugg? Oh! all right! Here we are.You are to understand that we are this very day virtually complete. We shan't be legally for a day or two. Call it at the outside a week. We've been at it night and day for I don't know how long. Mr Rugg, you know how long? Never mind. Don't say. You'll only confuse me. You shall tell her, Mr Clennam. Not till we give you leave. Where's that rough total, Mr Rugg? Oh! Here we are! There sir! That's what you'll have to break to her. That man's your Father of the Marshalsea!'

CHAPTER 33.

Mrs Merdle's Complaint

Resigning herself to inevitable fate by making the best of those people, the Miggleses, and submitting her philosophy to the draught upon it, of which she had foreseen the likelihood in her interview with Arthur, Mrs Gowan handsomely resolved not to oppose her son's marriage. In her progress to, and happy arrival at, this resolution, she was possibly influenced, not only by her maternal affections but by three politic considerations.

Of these, the first may have been that her son had never signified the smallest intention to ask her consent, or any mistrust of his ability to dispense with it; the second, that the pension bestowed upon her by a grateful country (and a Barnacle) would be freed from any little filial inroads, when her Henry should be married to the darling only child of a man in very easy circumstances; the third, that Henry's debts must clearly be paid down upon the altarrailing by his fatherinlaw. When, to these threefold points of prudence there is added the fact that Mrs Gowan yielded her consent the moment she knew of Mr Meagles having yielded his, and that Mr Meagles's objection to the marriage had been the sole obstacle in its way all along, it becomes the height of probability that the relict of the deceased Commissioner of nothing particular, turned these ideas in her sagacious mind.

Among her connections and acquaintances, however, she maintained her

individual dignity and the dignity of the blood of the Barnacles, by diligently nursing the pretence that it was a most unfortunate business; that she was sadly cut up by it; that this was a perfect fascination under which Henry laboured; that she had opposed it for a long time, but what could a mother do; and the like. She had already called Arthur Clennam to bear witness to this fable, as a friend of the Meagles family; and she followed up the move by now impounding the family itself for the same purpose. In the first interview she accorded to Mr Meagles, she slided herself into the position of disconsolately but gracefully yielding to irresistible pressure. With the utmost politeness and goodbreeding, she feigned that it was shenot hewho had made the difficulty, and who at length gave way; and that the sacrifice was hersnot his. The same feint, with the same polite dexterity, she foisted on Mrs Meagles, as a conjuror might have forced a card on that innocent lady; and, when her future daughterinlaw was presented to her by her son, she said on embracing her, 'My dear, what have you done to Henry that has bewitched him so!' at the same time allowing a few tears to carry before them, in little pills, the cosmetic powder on her nose; as a delicate but touching signal that she suffered much inwardly for the show of composure with which she bore her misfortune.

Among the friends of Mrs Gowan (who piqued herself at once on being Society, and on maintaining intimate and easy relations with that Power), Mrs Merdle occupied a front row. True, the Hampton Court Bohemians, without exception, turned up their noses at Merdle as an upstart; but they turned them down again, by falling flat on their faces to worship his wealth. In which compensating adjustment of their noses, they were pretty much like Treasury, Bar, and Bishop, and all the rest of them.

To Mrs Merdle, Mrs Gowan repaired on a visit of selfcondolence, after having given the gracious consent aforesaid. She drove into town for the purpose in a onehorse carriage irreverently called at that period of English history, a pillbox. It belonged to a jobmaster in a small way, who drove it himself, and who jobbed it by the day, or hour, to most of the old ladies in Hampton Court Palace; but it was a point of ceremony, in that encampment, that the whole equipage should be tacitly regarded as the private property of the jobber for the time being, and that the jobmaster should betray personal knowledge of nobody but the jobber in possession. So the Circumlocution Barnacles, who were the largest jobmasters in the universe, always pretended to know of no other job but the job immediately in hand.

Mrs Merdle was at home, and was in her nest of crimson and gold, with the parrot on a neighbouring stem watching her with his head on one side, as if he took her for another splendid parrot of a larger species. To whom entered Mrs Gowan, with her favourite green fan, which softened the light on the spots of bloom.

'My dear soul,' said Mrs Gowan, tapping the back of her friend's hand with this fan after a little indifferent conversation, 'you are my only comfort. That affair of Henry's that I told you of, is to take place. Now, how does it strike you? I am dying to know, because you represent and express Society so well.'

Mrs Merdle reviewed the bosom which Society was accustomed to review; and having ascertained that showwindow of Mr Merdle's and the London jewellers' to be in good order, replied:

'As to marriage on the part of a man, my dear, Society requires that he should retrieve his fortunes by marriage. Society requires that he should gain by marriage. Society requires that he should found a handsome establishment by marriage. Society does not see, otherwise, what he has to do with marriage. Bird, be quiet!'

For the parrot on his cage above them, presiding over the conference as if he were a judge (and indeed he looked rather like one), had wound up the exposition with a shriek.

'Cases there are,' said Mrs Merdle, delicately crooking the little finger of her favourite hand, and making her remarks neater by that neat action; 'cases there are where a man is not young or elegant, and is rich, and has a handsome establishment already. Those are of a different kind. In such cases'

Mrs Merdle shrugged her snowy shoulders and put her hand upon the jewelstand, checking a little cough, as though to add, 'why, a man looks out for this sort of thing, my dear.' Then the parrot shrieked again, and she put up her glass to look at him, and said, 'Bird! Do be quiet!' 'But, young men,' resumed Mrs Merdle, 'and by young men you know what I mean, my loveI mean people's sons who have the world before themthey must place themselves in a better position towards Society by marriage, or Society really will not have any patience with their making fools of themselves. Dreadfully worldly all this sounds,' said Mrs Merdle, leaning back in her nest and putting up her glass again, 'does it not?'

'But it is true,' said Mrs Gowan, with a highly moral air.

'My dear, it is not to be disputed for a moment,' returned Mrs Merdle; 'because Society has made up its mind on the subject, and there is nothing more to be said. If we were in a more primitive state, if we lived under roofs of leaves, and kept cows and sheep and creatures instead of banker's accounts (which would be delicious; my dear, I am pastoral to a degree, by nature), well and good. But we don't live under leaves, and keep cows and sheep and creatures. I perfectly exhaust myself sometimes, in pointing out the distinction to Edmund Sparkler.'

Mrs Gowan, looking over her green fan when this young gentleman's name was mentioned, replied as follows:

'My love, you know the wretched state of the countrythose unfortunate concessions of John Barnacle's!and you therefore know the reasons for my being as poor as Thingummy.'

'A church mouse?' Mrs Merdle suggested with a smile.

'I was thinking of the other proverbial church personJob,' said Mrs Gowan. 'Either will do. It would be idle to disguise, consequently, that there is a wide difference between the position of your son and mine. I may add, too, that Henry has talent'

'Which Edmund certainly has not,' said Mrs Merdle, with the greatest suavity.

'and that his talent, combined with disappointment,' Mrs Gowan went on, 'has led him into a pursuit whichah dear me! You know, my dear. Such being Henry's different position, the question is what is the most inferior class of marriage to which I can reconcile myself.'

Mrs Merdle was so much engaged with the contemplation of her arms (beautifulformed arms, and the very thing for bracelets), that she omitted to reply for a while. Roused at length by the silence, she folded the arms, and with admirable presence of mind looked her friend full in the face, and said interrogatively, 'Yees? And then?'

'And then, my dear,' said Mrs Gowan not quite so sweetly as before, 'I should be glad to hear what you have to say to it.'

Here the parrot, who had been standing on one leg since he screamed last, burst into a fit of laughter, bobbed himself derisively up and down on both legs, and finished by standing on one leg again, and pausing for a reply, with his head as much awry as he could possibly twist it.

'Sounds mercenary to ask what the gentleman is to get with the lady,' said Mrs Merdle; 'but Society is perhaps a little mercenary, you know, my dear.'

'From what I can make out,' said Mrs Gowan, 'I believe I may say that Henry will be relieved from debt'

'Much in debt?' asked Mrs Merdle through her eyeglass.

'Why tolerably, I should think,' said Mrs Gowan.

'Meaning the usual thing; I understand; just so,' Mrs Merdle observed in a comfortable sort of way.

'And that the father will make them an allowance of three hundred ayear, or

perhaps altogether something more, which, in Italy'

'Oh! Going to Italy?' said Mrs Merdle.

'For Henry to study. You need be at no loss to guess why, my dear.

That dreadful Art'

True. Mrs Merdle hastened to spare the feelings of her afflicted friend. She understood. Say no more!

'And that,' said Mrs Gowan, shaking her despondent head, 'that's all. That,' repeated Mrs Gowan, furling her green fan for the moment, and tapping her chin with it (it was on the way to being a double chin; might be called a chin and a half at present), 'that's all! On the death of the old people, I suppose there will be more to come; but how it may be restricted or locked up, I don't know. And as to that, they may live for ever. My dear, they are just the kind of people to do it.'

Now, Mrs Merdle, who really knew her friend Society pretty well, and who knew what Society's mothers were, and what Society's daughters were, and what Society's matrimonial market was, and how prices ruled in it, and what scheming and counterscheming took place for the high buyers, and what bargaining and huckstering went on, thought in the depths of her capacious bosom that this was a sufficiently good catch. Knowing, however, what was expected of her, and perceiving the exact nature of the fiction to be nursed, she took it delicately in her arms, and put her required contribution of gloss upon it.

'And that is all, my dear?' said she, heaving a friendly sigh. 'Well, well! The fault is not yours. You have nothing to reproach yourself with. You must exercise the strength of mind for which you are renowned, and make the best of it.' 'The girl's family have made,' said Mrs Gowan, 'of course, the most strenuous endeavours toas the lawyers sayto have and to hold Henry.'

'Of course they have, my dear,' said Mrs Merdle.

'I have persisted in every possible objection, and have worried myself morning, noon, and night, for means to detach Henry from the connection.'

'No doubt you have, my dear,' said Mrs Merdle.

'And all of no use. All has broken down beneath me. Now tell me, my love. Am I justified in at last yielding my most reluctant consent to Henry's marrying among people not in Society; or, have I acted with inexcusable weakness?'

In answer to this direct appeal, Mrs Merdle assured Mrs Gowan (speaking as a

Priestess of Society) that she was highly to be commended, that she was much to be sympathised with, that she had taken the highest of parts, and had come out of the furnace refined. And Mrs Gowan, who of course saw through her own threadbare blind perfectly, and who knew that Mrs Merdle saw through it perfectly, and who knew that Society would see through it perfectly, came out of this form, notwithstanding, as she had gone into it, with immense complacency and gravity.

The conference was held at four or five o'clock in the afternoon, when all the region of Harley Street, Cavendish Square, was resonant of carriagewheels and doubleknocks. It had reached this point when Mr Merdle came home from his daily occupation of causing the British name to be more and more respected in all parts of the civilised globe capable of the appreciation of worldwide commercial enterprise and gigantic combinations of skill and capital. For, though nobody knew with the least precision what Mr Merdle's business was, except that it was to coin money, these were the terms in which everybody defined it on all ceremonious occasions, and which it was the last new polite reading of the parable of the camel and the needle's eye to accept without inquiry.

For a gentleman who had this splendid work cut out for him, Mr Merdle looked a little common, and rather as if, in the course of his vast transactions, he had accidentally made an interchange of heads with some inferior spirit. He presented himself before the two ladies in the course of a dismal stroll through his mansion, which had no apparent object but escape from the presence of the chief butler.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, stopping short in confusion; 'I didn't know there was anybody here but the parrot.'

However, as Mrs Merdle said, 'You can come in!' and as Mrs Gowan said she was just going, and had already risen to take her leave, he came in, and stood looking out at a distant window, with his hands crossed under his uneasy coatcuffs, clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody. In this attitude he fell directly into a reverie from which he was only aroused by his wife's calling to him from her ottoman, when they had been for some quarter of an hour alone.

'Eh? Yes?' said Mr Merdle, turning towards her. 'What is it?'

'What is it?' repeated Mrs Merdle. 'It is, I suppose, that you have not heard a word of my complaint.'

'Your complaint, Mrs Merdle?' said Mr Merdle. 'I didn't know that you were suffering from a complaint. What complaint?'

'A complaint of you,' said Mrs Merdle.

'Oh! A complaint of me,' said Mr Merdle. 'What is thewhat have Iwhat may you have to complain of in me, Mrs Merdle?' In his withdrawing, abstracted, pondering way, it took him some time to shape this question. As a kind of faint attempt to convince himself that he was the master of the house, he concluded by presenting his forefinger to the parrot, who expressed his opinion on that subject by instantly driving his bill into it.

'You were saying, Mrs Merdle,' said Mr Merdle, with his wounded finger in his mouth, 'that you had a complaint against me?'

'A complaint which I could scarcely show the justice of more emphatically, than by having to repeat it,' said Mrs Merdle. 'I might as well have stated it to the wall. I had far better have stated it to the bird. He would at least have screamed.'

'You don't want me to scream, Mrs Merdle, I suppose,' said Mr Merdle, taking a chair.

'Indeed I don't know,' retorted Mrs Merdle, 'but that you had better do that, than be so moody and distraught. One would at least know that you were sensible of what was going on around you.'

'A man might scream, and yet not be that, Mrs Merdle,' said Mr Merdle, heavily.

'And might be dogged, as you are at present, without screaming,' returned Mrs Merdle. 'That's very true. If you wish to know the complaint I make against you, it is, in so many plain words, that you really ought not to go into Society unless you can accommodate yourself to Society.'

Mr Merdle, so twisting his hands into what hair he had upon his head that he seemed to lift himself up by it as he started out of his chair, cried: 'Why, in the name of all the infernal powers, Mrs Merdle, who does more for Society than I do? Do you see these premises, Mrs Merdle?

Do you see this furniture, Mrs Merdle? Do you look in the glass and see yourself, Mrs Merdle? Do you know the cost of all this, and who it's all provided for? And yet will you tell me that I oughtn't to go into Society? I, who shower money upon it in this way? I, who might always be saidtototo harness myself to a wateringcart full of money, and go about saturating Society every day of my life.'

'Pray, don't be violent, Mr Merdle,' said Mrs Merdle.

'Violent?' said Mr Merdle. 'You are enough to make me desperate. You don't

know half of what I do to accommodate Society. You don't know anything of the sacrifices I make for it.'

'I know,' returned Mrs Merdle, 'that you receive the best in the land. I know that you move in the whole Society of the country. And I believe I know (indeed, not to make any ridiculous pretence about it, I know I know) who sustains you in it, Mr Merdle.'

'Mrs Merdle,' retorted that gentleman, wiping his dull red and yellow face, 'I know that as well as you do. If you were not an ornament to Society, and if I was not a benefactor to Society, you and I would never have come together. When I say a benefactor to it, I mean a person who provides it with all sorts of expensive things to eat and drink and look at. But, to tell me that I am not fit for it after all I have done for itafter all I have done for it,' repeated Mr Merdle, with a wild emphasis that made his wife lift up her eyelids, 'after allall!to tell me I have no right to mix with it after all, is a pretty reward.'

'I say,' answered Mrs Merdle composedly, 'that you ought to make yourself fit for it by being more degage, and less preoccupied. There is a positive vulgarity in carrying your business affairs about with you as you do.' 'How do I carry them about, Mrs Merdle?' asked Mr Merdle.

'How do you carry them about?' said Mrs Merdle. 'Look at yourself in the glass.'

Mr Merdle involuntarily turned his eyes in the direction of the nearest mirror, and asked, with a slow determination of his turbid blood to his temples, whether a man was to be called to account for his digestion?

'You have a physician,' said Mrs Merdle.

'He does me no good,' said Mr Merdle.

Mrs Merdle changed her ground.

'Besides,' said she, 'your digestion is nonsense. I don't speak of your digestion. I speak of your manner.' 'Mrs Merdle,' returned her husband, 'I look to you for that. You supply manner, and I supply money.'

'I don't expect you,' said Mrs Merdle, reposing easily among her cushions, 'to captivate people. I don't want you to take any trouble upon yourself, or to try to be fascinating. I simply request you to care about nothingor seem to care about nothingas everybody else does.'

'Do I ever say I care about anything?' asked Mr Merdle.

'Say? No! Nobody would attend to you if you did. But you show it.'

'Show what? What do I show?' demanded Mr Merdle hurriedly.

'I have already told you. You show that you carry your business cares an projects about, instead of leaving them in the City, or wherever else they belong to,' said Mrs Merdle. 'Or seeming to. Seeming would be quite enough: I ask no more. Whereas you couldn't be more occupied with your day's calculations and combinations than you habitually show yourself to be, if you were a carpenter.'

'A carpenter!' repeated Mr Merdle, checking something like a groan.

'I shouldn't so much mind being a carpenter, Mrs Merdle.'

'And my complaint is,' pursued the lady, disregarding the low remark, 'that it is not the tone of Society, and that you ought to correct it, Mr Merdle. If you have any doubt of my judgment, ask even Edmund Sparkler.' The door of the room had opened, and Mrs Merdle now surveyed the head of her son through her glass. 'Edmund; we want you here.'

Mr Sparkler, who had merely put in his head and looked round the room without entering (as if he were searching the house for that young lady with no nonsense about her), upon this followed up his head with his body, and stood before them. To whom, in a few easy words adapted to his capacity, Mrs Merdle stated the question at issue.

The young gentleman, after anxiously feeling his shirtcollar as if it were his pulse and he were hypochondriacal, observed, 'That he had heard it noticed by fellers.'

'Edmund Sparkler has heard it noticed,' said Mrs Merdle, with languid triumph. 'Why, no doubt everybody has heard it noticed!' Which in truth was no unreasonable inference; seeing that Mr Sparkler would probably be the last person, in any assemblage of the human species, to receive an impression from anything that passed in his presence.

'And Edmund Sparkler will tell you, I dare say,' said Mrs Merdle, waving her favourite hand towards her husband, 'how he has heard it noticed.' 'I couldn't,' said Mr Sparkler, after feeling his pulse as before, 'couldn't undertake to say what led to it'cause memory desperate loose. But being in company with the brother of a doosed fine galwell educated toowith no biggodd nonsense about herat the period alluded to'

'There! Never mind the sister,' remarked Mrs Merdle, a little impatiently. 'What did the brother say?'

'Didn't say a word, ma'am,' answered Mr Sparkler. 'As silent a feller as myself. Equally hard up for a remark.'

'Somebody said something,' returned Mrs Merdle. 'Never mind who it was.'

('Assure you I don't in the least,' said Mr Sparkler.)

'But tell us what it was.'

Mr Sparkler referred to his pulse again, and put himself through some severe mental discipline before he replied:

'Fellers referring to my Governorexpression not my ownoccasionally compliment my Governor in a very handsome way on being immensely rich and knowingperfect phenomenon of Buyer and Banker and thatbut say the Shop sits heavily on him. Say he carried the Shop about, on his back ratherlike Jew clothesmen with too much business.'

'Which,' said Mrs Merdle, rising, with her floating drapery about her, 'is exactly my complaint. Edmund, give me your arm upstairs.'

Mr Merdle, left alone to meditate on a better conformation of himself to Society, looked out of nine windows in succession, and appeared to see nine wastes of space. When he had thus entertained himself he went downstairs, and looked intently at all the carpets on the groundfloor; and then came upstairs again, and looked intently at all the carpets on the firstfloor; as if they were gloomy depths, in unison with his oppressed soul. Through all the rooms he wandered, as he always did, like the last person on earth who had any business to approach them. Let Mrs Merdle announce, with all her might, that she was at Home ever so many nights in a season, she could not announce more widely and unmistakably than Mr Merdle did that he was never at home.

At last he met the chief butler, the sight of which splendid retainer always finished him. Extinguished by this great creature, he sneaked to his dressingroom, and there remained shut up until he rode out to dinner, with Mrs Merdle, in her own handsome chariot. At dinner, he was envied and flattered as a being of might, was Treasuried, Barred, and Bishoped, as much as he would; and an hour after midnight came home alone, and being instantly put out again in his own hall, like a rushlight, by the chief butler, went sighing to bed.

CHAPTER 34.

A Shoal of Barnacles

Mr Henry Gowan and the dog were established frequenters of the cottage, and

the day was fixed for the wedding. There was to be a convocation of Barnacles on the occasion, in order that that very high and very large family might shed as much lustre on the marriage as so dim an event was capable of receiving.

To have got the whole Barnacle family together would have been impossible for two reasons. Firstly, because no building could have held all the members and connections of that illustrious house. Secondly, because wherever there was a square yard of ground in British occupation under the sun or moon, with a public post upon it, sticking to that post was a Barnacle. No intrepid navigator could plant a flagstaff upon any spot of earth, and take possession of it in the British name, but to that spot of earth, so soon as the discovery was known, the Circumlocution Office sent out a Barnacle and a despatchbox. Thus the Barnacles were all over the world, in every directiondespatchboxing the compass.

But, while the sopotent art of Prospero himself would have failed in summoning the Barnacles from every speck of ocean and dry land on which there was nothing (except mischief) to be done and anything to be pocketed, it was perfectly feasible to assemble a good many Barnacles. This Mrs Gowan applied herself to do; calling on Mr Meagles frequently with new additions to the list, and holding conferences with that gentleman when he was not engaged (as he generally was at this period) in examining and paying the debts of his future soninlaw, in the apartment of scales and scoops.

One marriage guest there was, in reference to whose presence Mr Meagles felt a nearer interest and concern than in the attendance of the most elevated Barnacle expected; though he was far from insensible of the honour of having such company. This guest was Clennam. But Clennam had made a promise he held sacred, among the trees that summer night, and, in the chivalry of his heart, regarded it as binding him to many implied obligations. In forgetfulness of himself, and delicate service to her on all occasions, he was never to fail; to begin it, he answered Mr Meagles cheerfully, 'I shall come, of course.'

His partner, Daniel Doyce, was something of a stumblingblock in Mr Meagles's way, the worthy gentleman being not at all clear in his own anxious mind but that the mingling of Daniel with official Barnacleism might produce some explosive combination, even at a marriage breakfast. The national offender, however, lightened him of his uneasiness by coming down to Twickenham to represent that he begged, with the freedom of an old friend, and as a favour to one, that he might not be invited. 'For,' said he, 'as my business with this set of gentlemen was to do a public duty and a public service, and as their business with me was to prevent it by wearing my soul out, I think we had better not eat and drink together with a show of being of one mind.' Mr Meagles was much amused by his friend's oddity; and

patronised him with a more protecting air of allowance than usual, when he rejoined: 'Well, well, Dan, you shall have your own crotchety way.'

To Mr Henry Gowan, as the time approached, Clennam tried to convey by all quiet and unpretending means, that he was frankly and disinterestedly desirous of tendering him any friendship he would accept. Mr Gowan treated him in return with his usual ease, and with his usual show of confidence, which was no confidence at all.

'You see, Clennam,' he happened to remark in the course of conversation one day, when they were walking near the Cottage within a week of the marriage, 'I am a disappointed man. That you know already.'

'Upon my word,' said Clennam, a little embarrassed, 'I scarcely know how.'

'Why,' returned Gowan, 'I belong to a clan, or a clique, or a family, or a connection, or whatever you like to call it, that might have provided for me in any one of fifty ways, and that took it into its head not to do it at all. So here I am, a poor devil of an artist.'

Clennam was beginning, 'But on the other hand' when Gowan took him up.

'Yes, yes, I know. I have the good fortune of being beloved by a beautiful and charming girl whom I love with all my heart.' ('Is there much of it?' Clennam thought. And as he thought it, felt ashamed of himself.)

'And of finding a fatherinlaw who is a capital fellow and a liberal good old boy. Still, I had other prospects washed and combed into my childish head when it was washed and combed for me, and I took them to a public school when I washed and combed it for myself, and I am here without them, and thus I am a disappointed man.'

Clennam thought (and as he thought it, again felt ashamed of himself), was this notion of being disappointed in life, an assertion of station which the bridegroom brought into the family as his property, having already carried it detrimentally into his pursuit? And was it a hopeful or a promising thing anywhere?

'Not bitterly disappointed, I think,' he said aloud. 'Hang it, no; not bitterly,' laughed Gowan. 'My people are not worth thatthough they are charming fellows, and I have the greatest affection for them. Besides, it's pleasant to show them that I can do without them, and that they may all go to the Devil. And besides, again, most men are disappointed in life, somehow or other, and influenced by their disappointment. But it's a dear good world, and I love it!'

'It lies fair before you now,' said Arthur.

'Fair as this summer river,' cried the other, with enthusiasm, 'and by Jove I glow with admiration of it, and with ardour to run a race in it. It's the best of old worlds! And my calling! The best of old callings, isn't it?'

'Full of interest and ambition, I conceive,' said Clennam.

'And imposition,' added Gowan, laughing; 'we won't leave out the imposition. I hope I may not break down in that; but there, my being a disappointed man may show itself. I may not be able to face it out gravely enough. Between you and me, I think there is some danger of my being just enough soured not to be able to do that.'

'To do what?' asked Clennam.

'To keep it up. To help myself in my turn, as the man before me helps himself in his, and pass the bottle of smoke. To keep up the pretence as to labour, and study, and patience, and being devoted to my art, and giving up many solitary days to it, and abandoning many pleasures for it, and living in it, and all the rest of itin short, to pass the bottle of smoke according to rule.'

'But it is well for a man to respect his own vocation, whatever it is; and to think himself bound to uphold it, and to claim for it the respect it deserves; is it not?' Arthur reasoned. 'And your vocation, Gowan, may really demand this suit and service. I confess I should have thought that all Art did.'

'What a good fellow you are, Clennam!' exclaimed the other, stopping to look at him, as if with irrepressible admiration. 'What a capital fellow! You have never been disappointed. That's easy to see.'

It would have been so cruel if he had meant it, that Clennam firmly resolved to believe he did not mean it. Gowan, without pausing, laid his hand upon his shoulder, and laughingly and lightly went on:

'Clennam, I don't like to dispel your generous visions, and I would give any money (if I had any), to live in such a rosecoloured mist. But what I do in my trade, I do to sell. What all we fellows do, we do to sell. If we didn't want to sell it for the most we can get for it, we shouldn't do it. Being work, it has to be done; but it's easily enough done. All the rest is hocuspocus.

Now here's one of the advantages, or disadvantages, of knowing a disappointed man. You hear the truth.'

Whatever he had heard, and whether it deserved that name or another, it sank into Clennam's mind. It so took root there, that he began to fear Henry Gowan would always be a trouble to him, and that so far he had gained little or nothing from the dismissal of Nobody, with all his inconsistencies, anxieties, and contradictions. He found a contest still always going on in his breast

between his promise to keep Gowan in none but good aspects before the mind of Mr Meagles, and his enforced observation of Gowan in aspects that had no good in them. Nor could he quite support his own conscientious nature against misgivings that he distorted and discoloured himself, by reminding himself that he never sought those discoveries, and that he would have avoided them with willingness and great relief. For he never could forget what he had been; and he knew that he had once disliked Gowan for no better reason than that he had come in his way.

Harassed by these thoughts, he now began to wish the marriage over, Gowan and his young wife gone, and himself left to fulfil his promise, and discharge the generous function he had accepted. This last week was, in truth, an uneasy interval for the whole house. Before Pet, or before Gowan, Mr Meagles was radiant; but Clennam had more than once found him alone, with his view of the scales and scoop much blurred, and had often seen him look after the lovers, in the garden or elsewhere when he was not seen by them, with the old clouded face on which Gowan had fallen like a shadow. In the arrangement of the house for the great occasion, many little reminders of the old travels of the father and mother and daughter had to be disturbed and passed from hand to hand; and sometimes, in the midst of these mute witnesses, to the life they had had together, even Pet herself would yield to lamenting and weeping. Mrs Meagles, the blithest and busiest of mothers, went about singing and cheering everybody; but she, honest soul, had her flights into store rooms, where she would cry until her eyes were red, and would then come out, attributing that appearance to pickled onions and pepper, and singing clearer than ever. Mrs Tickit, finding no balsam for a wounded mind in Buchan's Domestic Medicine, suffered greatly from low spirits, and from moving recollections of Minnie's infancy. When the latter was powerful with her, she usually sent up secret messages importing that she was not in parlour condition as to her attire, and that she solicited a sight of 'her child' in the kitchen; there, she would bless her child's face, and bless her child's heart, and hug her child, in a medley of tears and congratulations, choppingboards, rollingpins, and piecrust, with the tenderness of an old attached servant, which is a very pretty tenderness indeed.

But all days come that are to be; and the marriageday was to be, and it came; and with it came all the Barnacles who were bidden to the feast. There was Mr Tite Barnacle, from the Circumlocution Office, and Mews Street, Grosvenor Square, with the expensive Mrs Tite Barnacle NEE Stiltstalking, who made the Quarter Days so long in coming, and the three expensive Miss Tite Barnacles, doubleloaded with accomplishments and ready to go off, and yet not going off with the sharpness of flash and bang that might have been expected, but rather hanging fire. There was Barnacle junior, also from the Circumlocution Office, leaving the Tonnage of the country, which he was

somehow supposed to take under his protection, to look after itself, and, sooth to say, not at all impairing the efficiency of its protection by leaving it alone. There was the engaging Young Barnacle, deriving from the sprightly side of the family, also from the Circumlocution Office, gaily and agreeably helping the occasion along, and treating it, in his sparkling way, as one of the official forms and fees of the Church Department of How not to do it. There were three other Young Barnacles from three other offices, insipid to all the senses, and terribly in want of seasoning, doing the marriage as they would have 'done' the Nile, Old Rome, the new singer, or Jerusalem.

But there was greater game than this. There was Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle himself, in the odour of Circumlocutionwith the very smell of DespatchBoxes upon him. Yes, there was Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, who had risen to official heights on the wings of one indignant idea, and that was, My Lords, that I am yet to be told that it behoves a Minister of this free country to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent selfreliance, of its people. That was, in other words, that this great statesman was always yet to be told that it behoved the Pilot of the ship to do anything but prosper in the private loaf and fish trade ashore, the crew being able, by dint of hard pumping, to keep the ship above water without him. On this sublime discovery in the great art How not to do it, Lord Decimus had long sustained the highest glory of the Barnacle family; and let any illadvised member of either House but try How to do it by bringing in a Bill to do it, that Bill was as good as dead and buried when Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle rose up in his place and solemnly said, soaring into indignant majesty as the Circumlocution cheering soared around him, that he was yet to be told, My Lords, that it behoved him as the Minister of this free country, to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent selfreliance, of its people. The discovery of this Behoving Machine was the discovery of the political perpetual motion. It never wore out, though it was always going round and round in all the State Departments.

And there, with his noble friend and relative Lord Decimus, was William Barnacle, who had made the everfamous coalition with Tudor Stiltstalking, and who always kept ready his own particular recipe for How not to do it; sometimes tapping the Speaker, and drawing it fresh out of him, with a 'First, I will beg you, sir, to inform the House what Precedent we have for the course into which the honourable gentleman would precipitate us;' sometimes asking the honourable gentleman to favour him with his own version of the Precedent; sometimes telling the honourable gentleman that he (William Barnacle) would search for a Precedent; and oftentimes crushing the honourable gentleman flat on the spot by telling him there was no Precedent.

But Precedent and Precipitate were, under all circumstances, the wellmatched pair of battlehorses of this able Circumlocutionist. No matter that the unhappy honourable gentleman had been trying in vain, for twentyfive years, to precipitate William Barnacle into thisWilliam Barnacle still put it to the House, and (at secondhand or so) to the country, whether he was to be precipitated into this. No matter that it was utterly irreconcilable with the nature of things and course of events that the wretched honourable gentleman could possibly produce a Precedent for thisWilliam Barnacle would nevertheless thank the honourable gentleman for that ironical cheer, and would close with him upon that issue, and would tell him to his teeth that there Was NO Precedent for this. It might perhaps have been objected that the William Barnacle wisdom was not high wisdom or the earth it bamboozled would never have been made, or, if made in a rash mistake, would have remained blank mud. But Precedent and Precipitate together frightened all objection out of most people.

And there, too, was another Barnacle, a lively one, who had leaped through twenty places in quick succession, and was always in two or three at once, and who was the muchrespected inventor of an art which he practised with great success and admiration in all Barnacle Governments. This was, when he was asked a Parliamentary question on any one topic, to return an answer on any other. It had done immense service, and brought him into high esteem with the Circumlocution Office.

And there, too, was a sprinkling of less distinguished Parliamentary Barnacles, who had not as yet got anything snug, and were going through their probation to prove their worthiness. These Barnacles perched upon staircases and hid in passages, waiting their orders to make houses or not to make houses; and they did all their hearing, and ohing, and cheering, and barking, under directions from the heads of the family; and they put dummy motions on the paper in the way of other men's motions; and they stalled disagreeable subjects off until late in the night and late in the session, and then with virtuous patriotism cried out that it was too late; and they went down into the country, whenever they were sent, and swore that Lord Decimus had revived trade from a swoon, and commerce from a fit, and had doubled the harvest of corn, quadrupled the harvest of hay, and prevented no end of gold from flying out of the Bank. Also these Barnacles were dealt, by the heads of the family, like so many cards below the courtcards, to public meetings and dinners; where they bore testimony to all sorts of services on the part of their noble and honourable relatives, and buttered the Barnacles on all sorts of toasts. And they stood, under similar orders, at all sorts of elections; and they turned out of their own seats, on the shortest notice and the most unreasonable terms, to let in other men; and they fetched and carried, and toadied and jobbed, and corrupted, and

ate heaps of dirt, and were indefatigable in the public service. And there was not a list, in all the Circumlocution Office, of places that might fall vacant anywhere within half a century, from a lord of the Treasury to a Chinese consul, and up again to a governorgeneral of India, but as applicants for such places, the names of some or of every one of these hungry and adhesive Barnacles were down.

It was necessarily but a sprinkling of any class of Barnacles that attended the marriage, for there were not two score in all, and what is that subtracted from Legion! But the sprinkling was a swarm in the Twickenham cottage, and filled it. A Barnacle (assisted by a Barnacle) married the happy pair, and it behoved Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle himself to conduct Mrs Meagles to breakfast.

The entertainment was not as agreeable and natural as it might have been. Mr Meagles, hove down by his good company while he highly appreciated it, was not himself. Mrs Gowan was herself, and that did not improve him. The fiction that it was not Mr Meagles who had stood in the way, but that it was the Family greatness, and that the Family greatness had made a concession, and there was now a soothing unanimity, pervaded the affair, though it was never openly expressed. Then the Barnacles felt that they for their parts would have done with the Meagleses when the present patronising occasion was over; and the Meagleses felt the same for their parts. Then Gowan asserting his rights as a disappointed man who had his grudge against the family, and who, perhaps, had allowed his mother to have them there, as much in the hope it might give them some annoyance as with any other benevolent object, aired his pencil and his poverty ostentatiously before them, and told them he hoped in time to settle a crust of bread and cheese on his wife, and that he begged such of them as (more fortunate than himself) came in for any good thing, and could buy a picture, to please to remember the poor painter. Then Lord Decimus, who was a wonder on his own Parliamentary pedestal, turned out to be the windiest creature here: proposing happiness to the bride and bridegroom in a series of platitudes that would have made the hair of any sincere disciple and believer stand on end; and trotting, with the complacency of an idiotic elephant, among howling labyrinths of sentences which he seemed to take for high roads, and never so much as wanted to get out of. Then Mr Tite Barnacle could not but feel that there was a person in company, who would have disturbed his lifelong sitting to Sir Thomas Lawrence in full official character, if such disturbance had been possible: while Barnacle junior did, with indignation, communicate to two vapid gentlemen, his relatives, that there was a feller here, look here, who had come to our Department without an appointment and said he wanted to know, you know; and that, look here, if he was to break out now, as he might you know (for you never could tell what an ungentlemanly Radical of that sort would be up to next), and was to say, look here, that he

wanted to know this moment, you know, that would be jolly; wouldn't it?

The pleasantest part of the occasion by far, to Clennam, was the painfullest. When Mr and Mrs Meagles at last hung about Pet in the room with the two pictures (where the company were not), before going with her to the threshold which she could never recross to be the old Pet and the old delight, nothing could be more natural and simple than the three were. Gowan himself was touched, and answered Mr Meagles's 'O Gowan, take care of her, take care of her!' with an earnest 'Don't be so brokenhearted, sir. By Heaven I will!'

And so, with the last sobs and last loving words, and a last look to Clennam of confidence in his promise, Pet fell back in the carriage, and her husband waved his hand, and they were away for Dover; though not until the faithful Mrs Tickit, in her silk gown and jet black curls, had rushed out from some hidingplace, and thrown both her shoes after the carriage: an apparition which occasioned great surprise to the distinguished company at the windows.

The said company being now relieved from further attendance, and the chief Barnacles being rather hurried (for they had it in hand just then to send a mail or two which was in danger of going straight to its destination, beating about the seas like the Flying Dutchman, and to arrange with complexity for the stoppage of a good deal of important business otherwise in peril of being done), went their several ways; with all affability conveying to Mr and Mrs Meagles that general assurance that what they had been doing there, they had been doing at a sacrifice for Mr and Mrs Meagles's good, which they always conveyed to Mr John Bull in their official condescension to that most unfortunate creature.

A miserable blank remained in the house and in the hearts of the father and mother and Clennam. Mr Meagles called only one remembrance to his aid, that really did him good.

'It's very gratifying, Arthur,' he said, 'after all, to look back upon.'

'The past?' said Clennam.

'Yesbut I mean the company.'

It had made him much more low and unhappy at the time, but now it really did him good. 'It's very gratifying,' he said, often repeating the remark in the course of the evening. 'Such high company!'

CHAPTER 35.

What was behind Mr Pancks on Little Dorrit's Hand

It was at this time that Mr Pancks, in discharge of his compact with Clennam, revealed to him the whole of his gipsy story, and told him Little Dorrit's fortune. Her father was heiratlaw to a great estate that had long lain unknown of, unclaimed, and accumulating. His right was now clear, nothing interposed in his way, the Marshalsea gates stood open, the Marshalsea walls were down, a few flourishes of his pen, and he was extremely rich.

In his tracking out of the claim to its complete establishment, Mr Pancks had shown a sagacity that nothing could baffle, and a patience and secrecy that nothing could tire. 'I little thought, sir,' said Pancks, 'when you and I crossed Smithfield that night, and I told you what sort of a Collector I was, that this would come of it. I little thought, sir, when I told you you were not of the Clennams of Cornwall, that I was ever going to tell you who were of the Dorrits of Dorsetshire.' He then went on to detail. How, having that name recorded in his notebook, he was first attracted by the name alone. How, having often found two exactly similar names, even belonging to the same place, to involve no traceable consanguinity, near or distant, he did not at first give much heed to this, except in the way of speculation as to what a surprising change would be made in the condition of a little seamstress, if she could be shown to have any interest in so large a property. How he rather supposed himself to have pursued the idea into its next degree, because there was something uncommon in the quiet little seamstress, which pleased him and provoked his curiosity.

How he had felt his way inch by inch, and 'Moled it out, sir' (that was Mr Pancks's expression), grain by grain. How, in the beginning of the labour described by this new verb, and to render which the more expressive Mr Pancks shut his eyes in pronouncing it and shook his hair over them, he had alternated from sudden lights and hopes to sudden darkness and no hopes, and back again, and back again. How he had made acquaintances in the Prison, expressly that he might come and go there as all other comers and goers did; and how his first ray of light was unconsciously given him by Mr Dorrit himself and by his son; to both of whom he easily became known; with both of whom he talked much, casually ('but always Moleing you'll observe,' said Mr Pancks): and from whom he derived, without being at all suspected, two or three little points of family history which, as he began to hold clues of his own, suggested others. How it had at length become plain to Mr Pancks that he had made a real discovery of the heiratlaw to a great fortune, and that his discovery had but to be ripened to legal fulness and perfection. How he had, thereupon, sworn his landlord, Mr Rugg, to secrecy in a solemn manner, and taken him into Moleing partnership.

How they had employed John Chivery as their sole clerk and agent, seeing to whom he was devoted. And how, until the present hour, when authorities mighty in the Bank and learned in the law declared their successful labours ended, they had confided in no other human being.

'So if the whole thing had broken down, sir,' concluded Pancks, 'at the very last, say the day before the other day when I showed you our papers in the Prison yard, or say that very day, nobody but ourselves would have been cruelly disappointed, or a penny the worse.'

Clennam, who had been almost incessantly shaking hands with him throughout the narrative, was reminded by this to say, in an amazement which even the preparation he had had for the main disclosure smoothed down, 'My dear Mr Pancks, this must have cost you a great sum of money.'

'Pretty well, sir,' said the triumphant Pancks. 'No trifle, though we did it as cheap as it could be done. And the outlay was a difficulty, let me tell you.'

'A difficulty!' repeated Clennam. 'But the difficulties you have so wonderfully conquered in the whole business!' shaking his hand again.

'I'll tell you how I did it,' said the delighted Pancks, putting his hair into a condition as elevated as himself. 'First, I spent all I had of my own. That wasn't much.'

'I am sorry for it,' said Clennam: 'not that it matters now, though. Then, what did you do?'

'Then,' answered Pancks, 'I borrowed a sum of my proprietor.'

'Of Mr Casby?' said Clennam. 'He's a fine old fellow.'

'Noble old boy; an't he?' said Mr Pancks, entering on a series of the dryest snorts. 'Generous old buck. Confiding old boy. Philanthropic old buck. Benevolent old boy! Twenty per cent. I engaged to pay him, sir. But we never do business for less at our shop.'

Arthur felt an awkward consciousness of having, in his exultant condition, been a little premature.

'I said to that boilingover old Christian,' Mr Pancks pursued, appearing greatly to relish this descriptive epithet, 'that I had got a little project on hand; a hopeful one; I told him a hopeful one; which wanted a certain small capital. I proposed to him to lend me the money on my note. Which he did, at twenty; sticking the twenty on in a businesslike way, and putting it into the note, to look like a part of the principal. If I had broken down after that, I should have been his grubber for the next seven years at half wages and double grind. But

he's a perfect Patriarch; and it would do a man good to serve him on such termson any terms.'

Arthur for his life could not have said with confidence whether Pancks really thought so or not.

'When that was gone, sir,' resumed Pancks, 'and it did go, though I dribbled it out like so much blood, I had taken Mr Rugg into the secret. I proposed to borrow of Mr Rugg (or of Miss Rugg; it's the same thing; she made a little money by a speculation in the Common Pleas once). He lent it at ten, and thought that pretty high. But Mr Rugg's a redhaired man, sir, and gets his hair cut. And as to the crown of his hat, it's high. And as to the brim of his hat, it's narrow. And there's no more benevolence bubbling out of him, than out of a ninepin.'

'Your own recompense for all this, Mr Pancks,' said Clennam, 'ought to be a large one.'

'I don't mistrust getting it, sir,' said Pancks. 'I have made no bargain. I owed you one on that score; now I have paid it. Money out of pocket made good, time fairly allowed for, and Mr Rugg's bill settled, a thousand pounds would be a fortune to me. That matter I place in your hands. I authorize you now to break all this to the family in any way you think best. Miss Amy Dorrit will be with Mrs Finching this morning. The sooner done the better. Can't be done too soon.'

This conversation took place in Clennam's bedroom, while he was yet in bed. For Mr Pancks had knocked up the house and made his way in, very early in the morning; and, without once sitting down or standing still, had delivered himself of the whole of his details (illustrated with a variety of documents) at the bedside. He now said he would 'go and look up Mr Rugg', from whom his excited state of mind appeared to require another back; and bundling up his papers, and exchanging one more hearty shake of the hand with Clennam, he went at full speed downstairs, and steamed off.

Clennam, of course, resolved to go direct to Mr Casby's. He dressed and got out so quickly that he found himself at the corner of the patriarchal street nearly an hour before her time; but he was not sorry to have the opportunity of calming himself with a leisurely walk.

When he returned to the street, and had knocked at the bright brass knocker, he was informed that she had come, and was shown upstairs to Flora's breakfastroom. Little Dorrit was not there herself, but Flora was, and testified the greatest amazement at seeing him.

'Good gracious, ArthurDoyce and Clennam!' cried that lady, 'who would have

ever thought of seeing such a sight as this and pray excuse a wrapper for upon my word I really never and a faded check too which is worse but our little friend is making me, not that I need mind mentioning it to you for you must know that there are such things a skirt, and having arranged that a trying on should take place after breakfast is the reason though I wish not so badly starched.'

'I ought to make an apology,' said Arthur, 'for so early and abrupt a visit; but you will excuse it when I tell you the cause.'

'In times for ever fled Arthur,' returned Mrs Finching, 'pray excuse me Doyce and Clennam infinitely more correct and though unquestionably distant still 'tis distance lends enchantment to the view, at least I don't mean that and if I did I suppose it would depend considerably on the nature of the view, but I'm running on again and you put it all out of my head.'

She glanced at him tenderly, and resumed:

'In times for ever fled I was going to say it would have sounded strange indeed for Arthur ClennamDoyce and Clennam naturally quite differentto make apologies for coming here at any time, but that is past and what is past can never be recalled except in his own case as poor Mr F. said when he was in spirits Cucumber and therefore never ate it.'

She was making the tea when Arthur came in, and now hastily finished that operation.

'Papa,' she said, all mystery and whisper, as she shut down the teapot lid, 'is sitting prosingly breaking his new laid egg in the back parlour over the City article exactly like the Woodpecker Tapping and need never know that you are here, and our little friend you are well aware may be fully trusted when she comes down from cutting out on the large table overhead.'

Arthur then told her, in the fewest words, that it was their little friend he came to see; and what he had to announce to their little friend. At which astounding intelligence, Flora clasped her hands, fell into a tremble, and shed tears of sympathy and pleasure, like the goodnatured creature she really was.

'For goodness sake let me get out of the way first,' said Flora, putting her hands to her ears and moving towards the door, 'or I know I shall go off dead and screaming and make everybody worse, and the dear little thing only this morning looking so nice and neat and good and yet so poor and now a fortune is she really and deserves it too! and might I mention it to Mr F.'s Aunt Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once or if objectionable not on any account.'

Arthur nodded his free permission, since Flora shut out all verbal

communication. Flora nodded in return to thank him, and hurried out of the room.

Little Dorrit's step was already on the stairs, and in another moment she was at the door. Do what he could to compose his face, he could not convey so much of an ordinary expression into it, but that the moment she saw it she dropped her work, and cried, 'Mr Clennam! What's the matter?'

'Nothing, nothing. That is, no misfortune has happened. I have come to tell you something, but it is a piece of great goodfortune.' 'Goodfortune?'

'Wonderful fortune!'

They stood in a window, and her eyes, full of light, were fixed upon his face. He put an arm about her, seeing her likely to sink down. She put a hand upon that arm, partly to rest upon it, and partly so to preserve their relative positions as that her intent look at him should be shaken by no change of attitude in either of them. Her lips seemed to repeat 'Wonderful fortune?' He repeated it again, aloud.

'Dear Little Dorrit! Your father.'

The ice of the pale face broke at the word, and little lights and shoots of expression passed all over it. They were all expressions of pain. Her breath was faint and hurried. Her heart beat fast. He would have clasped the little figure closer, but he saw that the eyes appealed to him not to be moved.

'Your father can be free within this week. He does not know it; we must go to him from here, to tell him of it. Your father will be free within a few days. Your father will be free within a few hours. Remember we must go to him from here, to tell him of it!'

That brought her back. Her eyes were closing, but they opened again.

'This is not all the goodfortune. This is not all the wonderful goodfortune, my dear Little Dorrit. Shall I tell you more?'

Her lips shaped 'Yes.'

'Your father will be no beggar when he is free. He will want for nothing. Shall I tell you more? Remember! He knows nothing of it; we must go to him, from here, to tell him of it!'

She seemed to entreat him for a little time. He held her in his arm, and, after a pause, bent down his ear to listen.

'Did you ask me to go on?'

'Yes.'

'He will be a rich man. He is a rich man. A great sum of money is waiting to be paid over to him as his inheritance; you are all henceforth very wealthy. Bravest and best of children, I thank Heaven that you are rewarded!'

As he kissed her, she turned her head towards his shoulder, and raised her arm towards his neck; cried out 'Father! Father! Father!' and swooned away.

Upon which Flora returned to take care of her, and hovered about her on a sofa, intermingling kind offices and incoherent scraps of conversation in a manner so confounding, that whether she pressed the Marshalsea to take a spoonful of unclaimed dividends, for it would do her good; or whether she congratulated Little Dorrit's father on coming into possession of a hundred thousand smellingbottles; or whether she explained that she put seventyfive thousand drops of spirits of lavender on fifty thousand pounds of lump sugar, and that she entreated Little Dorrit to take that gentle restorative; or whether she bathed the foreheads of Doyce and Clennam in vinegar, and gave the late Mr F. more air; no one with any sense of responsibility could have undertaken to decide. A tributary stream of confusion, moreover, poured in from an adjoining bedroom, where Mr F.'s Aunt appeared, from the sound of her voice, to be in a horizontal posture, awaiting her breakfast; and from which bower that inexorable lady snapped off short taunts, whenever she could get a hearing, as, 'Don't believe it's his doing!' and 'He needn't take no credit to himself for it!' and 'It'll be long enough, I expect, afore he'll give up any of his own money!' all designed to disparage Clennam's share in the discovery, and to relieve those inveterate feelings with which Mr F.'s Aunt regarded him.

But Little Dorrit's solicitude to get to her father, and to carry the joyful tidings to him, and not to leave him in his jail a moment with this happiness in store for him and still unknown to him, did more for her speedy restoration than all the skill and attention on earth could have done. 'Come with me to my dear father. Pray come and tell my dear father!' were the first words she said. Her father, her father. She spoke of nothing but him, thought of nothing but him. Kneeling down and pouring out her thankfulness with uplifted hands, her thanks were for her father.

Flora's tenderness was quite overcome by this, and she launched out among the cups and saucers into a wonderful flow of tears and speech.

'I declare,' she sobbed, 'I never was so cut up since your mama and my papa not Doyce and Clennam for this once but give the precious little thing a cup of tea and make her put it to her lips at least pray Arthur do, not even Mr F.'s last illness for that was of another kind and gout is not a child's affection though very painful for all parties and Mr F. a martyr with his leg upon a rest and the wine trade in itself inflammatory for they will do it more or less among themselves and who can wonder, it seems like a dream I am sure to think of

nothing at all this morning and now Mines of money is it really, but you must know my darling love because you never will be strong enough to tell him all about it upon teaspoons, mightn't it be even best to try the directions of my own medical man for though the flavour is anything but agreeable still I force myself to do it as a prescription and find the benefit, you'd rather not why no my dear I'd rather not but still I do it as a duty, everybody will congratulate you some in earnest and some not and many will congratulate you with all their hearts but none more so I do assure you from the bottom of my own I do myself though sensible of blundering and being stupid, and will be judged by Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once so goodbye darling and God bless you and may you be very happy and excuse the liberty, vowing that the dress shall never be finished by anybody else but shall be laid by for a keepsake just as it is and called Little Dorrit though why that strangest of denominations at any time I never did myself and now I never shall!'

Thus Flora, in taking leave of her favourite. Little Dorrit thanked her, and embraced her, over and over again; and finally came out of the house with Clennam, and took coach for the Marshalsea.

It was a strangely unreal ride through the old squalid streets, with a sensation of being raised out of them into an airy world of wealth and grandeur. When Arthur told her that she would soon ride in her own carriage through very different scenes, when all the familiar experiences would have vanished away, she looked frightened. But when he substituted her father for herself, and told her how he would ride in his carriage, and how great and grand he would be, her tears of joy and innocent pride fell fast. Seeing that the happiness her mind could realise was all shining upon him, Arthur kept that single figure before her; and so they rode brightly through the poor streets in the prison neighbourhood to carry him the great news.

When Mr Chivery, who was on duty, admitted them into the Lodge, he saw something in their faces which filled him with astonishment. He stood looking after them, when they hurried into the prison, as though he perceived that they had come back accompanied by a ghost apiece. Two or three Collegians whom they passed, looked after them too, and presently joining Mr Chivery, formed a little group on the Lodge steps, in the midst of which there spontaneously originated a whisper that the Father was going to get his discharge. Within a few minutes, it was heard in the remotest room in the College.

Little Dorrit opened the door from without, and they both entered. He was sitting in his old grey gown and his old black cap, in the sunlight by the window, reading his newspaper. His glasses were in his hand, and he had just looked round; surprised at first, no doubt, by her step upon the stairs, not expecting her until night; surprised again, by seeing Arthur Clennam in her

company. As they came in, the same unwonted look in both of them which had already caught attention in the yard below, struck him. He did not rise or speak, but laid down his glasses and his newspaper on the table beside him, and looked at them with his mouth a little open and his lips trembling. When Arthur put out his hand, he touched it, but not with his usual state; and then he turned to his daughter, who had sat down close beside him with her hands upon his shoulder, and looked attentively in her face.

'Father! I have been made so happy this morning!'

'You have been made so happy, my dear?'

'By Mr Clennam, father. He brought me such joyful and wonderful intelligence about you! If he had not with his great kindness and gentleness, prepared me for it, fatherprepared me for it, fatherI think I could not have borne it.'

Her agitation was exceedingly great, and the tears rolled down her face. He put his hand suddenly to his heart, and looked at Clennam.

'Compose yourself, sir,' said Clennam, 'and take a little time to think. To think of the brightest and most fortunate accidents of life. We have all heard of great surprises of joy. They are not at an end, sir. They are rare, but not at an end.'

'Mr Clennam? Not at an end? Not at an end for' He touched himself upon the breast, instead of saying 'me.'

'No,' returned Clennam.

'What surprise,' he asked, keeping his left hand over his heart, and there stopping in his speech, while with his right hand he put his glasses exactly level on the table: 'what such surprise can be in store for me?'

'Let me answer with another question. Tell me, Mr Dorrit, what surprise would be the most unlooked for and the most acceptable to you. Do not be afraid to imagine it, or to say what it would be.'

He looked steadfastly at Clennam, and, so looking at him, seemed to change into a very old haggard man. The sun was bright upon the wall beyond the window, and on the spikes at top. He slowly stretched out the hand that had been upon his heart, and pointed at the wall.

'It is down,' said Clennam. 'Gone!'

He remained in the same attitude, looking steadfastly at him.

'And in its place,' said Clennam, slowly and distinctly, 'are the means to possess and enjoy the utmost that they have so long shut out. Mr Dorrit, there

is not the smallest doubt that within a few days you will be free, and highly prosperous. I congratulate you with all my soul on this change of fortune, and on the happy future into which you are soon to carry the treasure you have been blest with herethe best of all the riches you can have elsewherethe treasure at your side.'

With those words, he pressed his hand and released it; and his daughter, laying her face against his, encircled him in the hour of his prosperity with her arms, as she had in the long years of his adversity encircled him with her love and toil and truth; and poured out her full heart in gratitude, hope, joy, blissful ecstasy, and all for him.

'I shall see him as I never saw him yet. I shall see my dear love, with the dark cloud cleared away. I shall see him, as my poor mother saw him long ago. O my dear, my dear! O father, father! O thank God, thank God!'

He yielded himself to her kisses and caresses, but did not return them, except that he put an arm about her. Neither did he say one word. His steadfast look was now divided between her and Clennam, and he began to shake as if he were very cold. Explaining to Little Dorrit that he would run to the coffeehouse for a bottle of wine, Arthur fetched it with all the haste he could use. While it was being brought from the cellar to the bar, a number of excited people asked him what had happened; when he hurriedly informed them that Mr Dorrit had succeeded to a fortune.

On coming back with the wine in his hand, he found that she had placed her father in his easy chair, and had loosened his shirt and neckcloth. They filled a tumbler with wine, and held it to his lips. When he had swallowed a little, he took the glass himself and emptied it. Soon after that, he leaned back in his chair and cried, with his handkerchief before his face.

After this had lasted a while Clennam thought it a good season for diverting his attention from the main surprise, by relating its details. Slowly, therefore, and in a quiet tone of voice, he explained them as best he could, and enlarged on the nature of Pancks's service.

'He shall behahe shall be handsomely recompensed, sir,' said the Father, starting up and moving hurriedly about the room. 'Assure yourself, Mr Clennam, that everybody concerned shall behashall be nobly rewarded. No one, my dear sir, shall say that he has an unsatisfied claim against me. I shall repay thehumthe advances I have had from you, sir, with peculiar pleasure. I beg to be informed at your earliest convenience, what advances you have made my son.'

He had no purpose in going about the room, but he was not still a moment.

'Everybody,' he said, 'shall be remembered. I will not go away from here in anybody's debt. All the people who have beenhawell behaved towards myself and my family, shall be rewarded. Chivery shall be rewarded. Young John shall be rewarded. I particularly wish, and intend, to act munificently, Mr Clennam.'

'Will you allow me,' said Arthur, laying his purse on the table, 'to supply any present contingencies, Mr Dorrit? I thought it best to bring a sum of money for the purpose.'

'Thank you, sir, thank you. I accept with readiness, at the present moment, what I could not an hour ago have conscientiously taken. I am obliged to you for the temporary accommodation. Exceedingly temporary, but well timedwell timed.' His hand had closed upon the money, and he carried it about with him. 'Be so kind, sir, as to add the amount to those former advances to which I have already referred; being careful, if you please, not to omit advances made to my son. A mere verbal statement of the gross amount is all I shallhaall I shall require.'

His eye fell upon his daughter at this point, and he stopped for a moment to kiss her, and to pat her head.

'It will be necessary to find a milliner, my love, and to make a speedy and complete change in your very plain dress. Something must be done with Maggy too, who at present ishabarely respectable, barely respectable. And your sister, Amy, and your brother. And my brother, your unclepoor soul, I trust this will rouse himmessengers must be despatched to fetch them. They must be informed of this. We must break it to them cautiously, but they must be informed directly. We owe it as a duty to them and to ourselves, from this moment, not to let themhumnot to let them do anything.'

This was the first intimation he had ever given, that he was privy to the fact that they did something for a livelihood.

He was still jogging about the room, with the purse clutched in his hand, when a great cheering arose in the yard. 'The news has spread already,' said Clennam, looking down from the window. 'Will you show yourself to them, Mr Dorrit? They are very earnest, and they evidently wish it.'

'IhumhaI confess I could have desired, Amy my dear,' he said, jogging about in a more feverish flutter than before, 'to have made some change in my dress first, and to have bought ahuma watch and chain. But if it must be done as it is, ithait must be done. Fasten the collar of my shirt, my dear. Mr Clennam, would you oblige mehumwith a blue neckcloth you will find in that drawer at your elbow. Button my coat across at the chest, my love. It lookshait looks broader, buttoned.'

With his trembling hand he pushed his grey hair up, and then, taking Clennam and his daughter for supporters, appeared at the window leaning on an arm of each. The Collegians cheered him very heartily, and he kissed his hand to them with great urbanity and protection. When he withdrew into the room again, he said 'Poor creatures!' in a tone of much pity for their miserable condition.

Little Dorrit was deeply anxious that he should lie down to compose himself. On Arthur's speaking to her of his going to inform Pancks that he might now appear as soon as he would, and pursue the joyful business to its close, she entreated him in a whisper to stay with her until her father should be quite calm and at rest. He needed no second entreaty; and she prepared her father's bed, and begged him to lie down. For another halfhour or more he would be persuaded to do nothing but go about the room, discussing with himself the probabilities for and against the Marshal's allowing the whole of the prisoners to go to the windows of the official residence which commanded the street, to see himself and family depart for ever in a carriagewhich, he said, he thought would be a Sight for them. But gradually he began to droop and tire, and at last stretched himself upon the bed.

She took her faithful place beside him, fanning him and cooling his forehead; and he seemed to be falling asleep (always with the money in his hand), when he unexpectedly sat up and said:

'Mr Clennam, I beg your pardon. Am I to understand, my dear sir, that I couldhacould pass through the Lodge at this moment, andhumtake a walk?'

'I think not, Mr Dorrit,' was the unwilling reply. 'There are certain forms to be completed; and although your detention here is now in itself a form, I fear it is one that for a little longer has to be observed too.'

At this he shed tears again.

'It is but a few hours, sir,' Clennam cheerfully urged upon him.

'A few hours, sir,' he returned in a sudden passion. 'You talk very easily of hours, sir! How long do you suppose, sir, that an hour is to a man who is choking for want of air?'

It was his last demonstration for that time; as, after shedding some more tears and querulously complaining that he couldn't breathe, he slowly fell into a slumber. Clennam had abundant occupation for his thoughts, as he sat in the quiet room watching the father on his bed, and the daughter fanning his face. Little Dorrit had been thinking too. After softly putting his grey hair aside, and touching his forehead with her lips, she looked towards Arthur, who came nearer to her, and pursued in a low whisper the subject of her thoughts.

'Mr Clennam, will he pay all his debts before he leaves here?'

'No doubt. All.'

'All the debts for which he had been imprisoned here, all my life and longer?'

'No doubt.'

There was something of uncertainty and remonstrance in her look; something that was not all satisfaction. He wondered to detect it, and said:

'You are glad that he should do so?'

'Are you?' asked Little Dorrit, wistfully.

'Am I? Most heartily glad!'

'Then I know I ought to be.'

'And are you not?'

'It seems to me hard,' said Little Dorrit, 'that he should have lost so many years and suffered so much, and at last pay all the debts as well. It seems to me hard that he should pay in life and money both.'

'My dear child' Clennam was beginning.

'Yes, I know I am wrong,' she pleaded timidly, 'don't think any worse of me; it has grown up with me here.'

The prison, which could spoil so many things, had tainted Little Dorrit's mind no more than this. Engendered as the confusion was, in compassion for the poor prisoner, her father, it was the first speck Clennam had ever seen, it was the last speck Clennam ever saw, of the prison atmosphere upon her.

He thought this, and forebore to say another word. With the thought, her purity and goodness came before him in their brightest light. The little spot made them the more beautiful.

Worn out with her own emotions, and yielding to the silence of the room, her hand slowly slackened and failed in its fanning movement, and her head dropped down on the pillow at her father's side. Clennam rose softly, opened and closed the door without a sound, and passed from the prison, carrying the quiet with him into the turbulent streets.

CHAPTER 36.

The Marshalsea becomes an Orphan

And now the day arrived when Mr Dorrit and his family were to leave the prison for ever, and the stones of its muchtrodden pavement were to know them no more.

The interval had been short, but he had greatly complained of its length, and had been imperious with Mr Rugg touching the delay. He had been high with Mr Rugg, and had threatened to employ some one else. He had requested Mr Rugg not to presume upon the place in which he found him, but to do his duty, sir, and to do it with promptitude. He had told Mr Rugg that he knew what lawyers and agents were, and that he would not submit to imposition. On that gentleman's humbly representing that he exerted himself to the utmost, Miss Fanny was very short with him; desiring to know what less he could do, when he had been told a dozen times that money was no object, and expressing her suspicion that he forgot whom he talked to.

Towards the Marshal, who was a Marshal of many years' standing, and with whom he had never had any previous difference, Mr Dorrit comported himself with severity. That officer, on personally tendering his congratulations, offered the free use of two rooms in his house for Mr Dorrit's occupation until his departure. Mr Dorrit thanked him at the moment, and replied that he would think of it; but the Marshal was no sooner gone than he sat down and wrote him a cutting note, in which he remarked that he had never on any former occasion had the honour of receiving his congratulations (which was true, though indeed there had not been anything particular to congratulate him upon), and that he begged, on behalf of himself and family, to repudiate the Marshal's offer, with all those thanks which its disinterested character and its perfect independence of all worldly considerations demanded.

Although his brother showed so dim a glimmering of interest in their altered fortunes that it was very doubtful whether he understood them, Mr Dorrit caused him to be measured for new raiment by the hosiers, tailors, hatters, and bootmakers whom he called in for himself; and ordered that his old clothes should be taken from him and burned. Miss Fanny and Mr Tip required no direction in making an appearance of great fashion and elegance; and the three passed this interval together at the best hotel in the neighbourhoodthough truly, as Miss Fanny said, the best was very indifferent. In connection with that establishment, Mr Tip hired a cabriolet, horse, and groom, a very neat turn out, which was usually to be observed for two or three hours at a time gracing the Borough High Street, outside the Marshalsea courtyard. A modest little hired chariot and pair was also frequently to be seen there; in alighting from and entering which vehicle, Miss Fanny fluttered the Marshal's daughters by the

display of inaccessible bonnets.

A great deal of business was transacted in this short period. Among other items, Messrs Peddle and Pool, solicitors, of Monument Yard, were instructed by their client Edward Dorrit, Esquire, to address a letter to Mr Arthur Clennam, enclosing the sum of twentyfour pounds nine shillings and eightpence, being the amount of principal and interest computed at the rate of five per cent. per annum, in which their client believed himself to be indebted to Mr Clennam. In making this communication and remittance, Messrs Peddle and Pool were further instructed by their client to remind Mr Clennam that the favour of the advance now repaid (including gatefees) had not been asked of him, and to inform him that it would not have been accepted if it had been openly proffered in his name. With which they requested a stamped receipt, and remained his obedient servants. A great deal of business had likewise to be done, within the sosoontobeorphaned Marshalsea, by Mr Dorrit so long its Father, chiefly arising out of applications made to him by Collegians for small sums of money. To these he responded with the greatest liberality, and with no lack of formality; always first writing to appoint a time at which the applicant might wait upon him in his room, and then receiving him in the midst of a vast accumulation of documents, and accompanying his donation (for he said in every such case, 'it is a donation, not a loan') with a great deal of good counsel: to the effect that he, the expiring Father of the Marshalsea, hoped to be long remembered, as an example that a man might preserve his own and the general respect even there.

The Collegians were not envious. Besides that they had a personal and traditional regard for a Collegian of so many years' standing, the event was creditable to the College, and made it famous in the newspapers. Perhaps more of them thought, too, than were quite aware of it, that the thing might in the lottery of chances have happened to themselves, or that something of the sort might yet happen to themselves some day or other. They took it very well. A few were low at the thought of being left behind, and being left poor; but even these did not grudge the family their brilliant reverse. There might have been much more envy in politer places. It seems probable that mediocrity of fortune would have been disposed to be less magnanimous than the Collegians, who lived from hand to mouthfrom the pawnbroker's hand to the day's dinner.

They got up an address to him, which they presented in a neat frame and glass (though it was not afterwards displayed in the family mansion or preserved among the family papers); and to which he returned a gracious answer. In that document he assured them, in a Royal manner, that he received the profession of their attachment with a full conviction of its sincerity; and again generally exhorted them to follow his examplewhich, at least in so far as coming into a great property was concerned, there is no doubt they would have gladly

imitated. He took the same occasion of inviting them to a comprehensive entertainment, to be given to the whole College in the yard, and at which he signified he would have the honour of taking a parting glass to the health and happiness of all those whom he was about to leave behind.

He did not in person dine at this public repast (it took place at two in the afternoon, and his dinners now came in from the hotel at six), but his son was so good as to take the head of the principal table, and to be very free and engaging. He himself went about among the company, and took notice of individuals, and saw that the viands were of the quality he had ordered, and that all were served. On the whole, he was like a baron of the olden time in a rare good humour. At the conclusion of the repast, he pledged his guests in a bumper of old Madeira; and told them that he hoped they had enjoyed themselves, and what was more, that they would enjoy themselves for the rest of the evening; that he wished them well; and that he bade them welcome.

His health being drunk with acclamations, he was not so baronial after all but that in trying to return thanks he broke down, in the manner of a mere serf with a heart in his breast, and wept before them all. After this great success, which he supposed to be a failure, he gave them 'Mr Chivery and his brother officers;' whom he had beforehand presented with ten pounds each, and who were all in attendance. Mr Chivery spoke to the toast, saying, What you undertake to lock up, lock up; but remember that you are, in the words of the fettered African, a man and a brother ever. The list of toasts disposed of, Mr Dorrit urbanely went through the motions of playing a game of skittles with the Collegian who was the next oldest inhabitant to himself; and left the tenantry to their diversions.

But all these occurrences preceded the final day. And now the day arrived when he and his family were to leave the prison for ever, and when the stones of its muchtrodden pavement were to know them no more.

Noon was the hour appointed for the departure. As it approached, there was not a Collegian within doors, nor a turnkey absent. The latter class of gentlemen appeared in their Sunday clothes, and the greater part of the Collegians were brightened up as much as circumstances allowed. Two or three flags were even displayed, and the children put on odds and ends of ribbon. Mr Dorrit himself, at this trying time, preserved a serious but graceful dignity. Much of his great attention was given to his brother, as to whose bearing on the great occasion he felt anxious.

'My dear Frederick,' said he, 'if you will give me your arm we will pass among our friends together. I think it is right that we should go out arm in arm, my dear Frederick.'

'Hah!' said Frederick. 'Yes, yes, yes, yes.'

'And if, my dear Frederickif you could, without putting any great constraint upon yourself, throw a little (pray excuse me, Frederick), a little Polish into your usual demeanour'

'William, William,' said the other, shaking his head, 'it's for you to do all that. I don't know how. All forgotten, forgotten!'

'But, my dear fellow,' returned William, 'for that very reason, if for no other, you must positively try to rouse yourself. What you have forgotten you must now begin to recall, my dear Frederick. Your position'

'Eh?' said Frederick.

'Your position, my dear Frederick.'

'Mine?' He looked first at his own figure, and then at his brother's, and then, drawing a long breath, cried, 'Hah, to be sure! Yes, yes, yes.' 'Your position, my dear Frederick, is now a fine one. Your position, as my brother, is a very fine one. And I know that it belongs to your conscientious nature to try to become worthy of it, my dear Frederick, and to try to adorn it. To be no discredit to it, but to adorn it.'

'William,' said the other weakly, and with a sigh, 'I will do anything you wish, my brother, provided it lies in my power. Pray be so kind as to recollect what a limited power mine is. What would you wish me to do today, brother? Say what it is, only say what it is.'

'My dearest Frederick, nothing. It is not worth troubling so good a heart as yours with.'

'Pray trouble it,' returned the other. 'It finds it no trouble, William, to do anything it can for you.'

William passed his hand across his eyes, and murmured with august satisfaction, 'Blessings on your attachment, my poor dear fellow!' Then he said aloud, 'Well, my dear Frederick, if you will only try, as we walk out, to show that you are alive to the occasionthat you think about it'

'What would you advise me to think about it?' returned his submissive brother.

'Oh! my dear Frederick, how can I answer you? I can only say what, in leaving these good people, I think myself.'

'That's it!' cried his brother. 'That will help me.'

'I find that I think, my dear Frederick, and with mixed emotions in which a softened compassion predominates, What will they do without me!'

'True,' returned his brother. 'Yes, yes, yes, yes. I'll think that as we go, What will they do without my brother! Poor things! What will they do without him!'

Twelve o'clock having just struck, and the carriage being reported ready in the outer courtyard, the brothers proceeded downstairs arminarm. Edward Dorrit, Esquire (once Tip), and his sister Fanny followed, also arminarm; Mr Plornish and Maggy, to whom had been entrusted the removal of such of the family effects as were considered worth removing, followed, bearing bundles and burdens to be packed in a cart.

In the yard, were the Collegians and turnkeys. In the yard, were Mr Pancks and Mr Rugg, come to see the last touch given to their work. In the yard, was Young John making a new epitaph for himself, on the occasion of his dying of a broken heart. In the yard, was the Patriarchal Casby, looking so tremendously benevolent that many enthusiastic Collegians grasped him fervently by the hand, and the wives and female relatives of many more Collegians kissed his hand, nothing doubting that he had done it all. In the yard, was the man with the shadowy grievance respecting the Fund which the Marshal embezzled, who had got up at five in the morning to complete the copying of a perfectly unintelligible history of that transaction, which he had committed to Mr Dorrit's care, as a document of the last importance, calculated to stun the Government and effect the Marshal's downfall. In the yard, was the insolvent whose utmost energies were always set on getting into debt, who broke into prison with as much pains as other men have broken out of it, and who was always being cleared and complimented; while the insolvent at his elbowa mere little, snivelling, striving tradesman, half dead of anxious efforts to keep out of debtfound it a hard matter, indeed, to get a Commissioner to release him with much reproof and reproach. In the yard, was the man of many children and many burdens, whose failure astonished everybody; in the yard, was the man of no children and large resources, whose failure astonished nobody. There, were the people who were always going out tomorrow, and always putting it off; there, were the people who had come in yesterday, and who were much more jealous and resentful of this freak of fortune than the seasoned birds. There, were some who, in pure meanness of spirit, cringed and bowed before the enriched Collegian and his family; there, were others who did so really because their eyes, accustomed to the gloom of their imprisonment and poverty, could not support the light of such bright sunshine. There, were many whose shillings had gone into his pocket to buy him meat and drink; but none who were now obtrusively Hail fellow well met! with him, on the strength of that assistance. It was rather to be remarked of the caged birds, that they were a little shy of the bird about to be so grandly free, and that they had a tendency to withdraw themselves towards the bars, and seem a little fluttered as he passed.

Through these spectators the little procession, headed by the two brothers, moved slowly to the gate. Mr Dorrit, yielding to the vast speculation how the poor creatures were to get on without him, was great, and sad, but not absorbed. He patted children on the head like Sir Roger de Coverley going to church, he spoke to people in the background by their Christian names, he condescended to all present, and seemed for their consolation to walk encircled by the legend in golden characters, 'Be comforted, my people! Bear it!'

At last three honest cheers announced that he had passed the gate, and that the Marshalsea was an orphan. Before they had ceased to ring in the echoes of the prison walls, the family had got into their carriage, and the attendant had the steps in his hand.

Then, and not before, 'Good Gracious!' cried Miss Fanny all at once, 'Where's Amy!'

Her father had thought she was with her sister. Her sister had thought she was 'somewhere or other.' They had all trusted to finding her, as they had always done, quietly in the right place at the right moment. This going away was perhaps the very first action of their joint lives that they had got through without her.

A minute might have been consumed in the ascertaining of these points, when Miss Fanny, who, from her seat in the carriage, commanded the long narrow passage leading to the Lodge, flushed indignantly.

'Now I do say, Pa,' cried she, 'that this is disgraceful!'

'What is disgraceful, Fanny?'

'I do say,' she repeated, 'this is perfectly infamous! Really almost enough, even at such a time as this, to make one wish one was dead! Here is that child Amy, in her ugly old shabby dress, which she was so obstinate about, Pa, which I over and over again begged and prayed her to change, and which she over and over again objected to, and promised to change today, saying she wished to wear it as long as ever she remained in there with youwhich was absolutely romantic nonsense of the lowest kindhere is that child Amy disgracing us to the last moment and at the last moment, by being carried out in that dress after all. And by that Mr Clennam too!'

The offence was proved, as she delivered the indictment. Clennam appeared at the carriagedoor, bearing the little insensible figure in his arms.

'She has been forgotten,' he said, in a tone of pity not free from reproach. 'I ran up to her room (which Mr Chivery showed me) and found the door open, and

that she had fainted on the floor, dear child. She appeared to have gone to change her dress, and to have sunk down overpowered. It may have been the cheering, or it may have happened sooner. Take care of this poor cold hand, Miss Dorrit. Don't let it fall.'

'Thank you, sir,' returned Miss Dorrit, bursting into tears. 'I believe I know what to do, if you will give me leave. Dear Amy, open your eyes, that's a love! Oh, Amy, Amy, I really am so vexed and ashamed! Do rouse yourself, darling! Oh, why are they not driving on! Pray, Pa, do drive on!'

The attendant, getting between Clennam and the carriagedoor, with a sharp 'By your leave, sir!' bundled up the steps, and they drove away.