Little Dorrit

Written by

Charles Dickens

Edited & Published by

LITTLE DORRIT

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Contents

PREFACE TO THE 1857 EDITION

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

If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman, without presuming to mention the unimportant fact of my having done that violence to good manners, in the days of a Russian war, and of a Court of Inquiry at Chelsea. If I might make so bold as to defend that extravagant conception, Mr Merdle, I would hint that it originated after the Railroad-share epoch, in the times of a certain Irish bank, and of one or two other equally laudable enterprises. If I were to plead anything in mitigation of the preposterous fancy that a bad design will sometimes claim to be a good and an expressly religious design, it would be the curious coincidence that it has been brought to its climax in these pages, in the days of the public examination of late Directors of a Royal British Bank. But, I submit myself to suffer judgment to go by default on all these counts, if need be, and to accept the assurance (on good authority) that nothing like them was ever known in this land. Some of my readers may have an interest in being informed

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

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

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

London May 1857

BOOK THE FIRST:

POVERTY

CHAPTER 1. SUN AND SHADOW

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

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

There was no wind to make a ripple on the foul water within the harbour, or on the beautiful sea without. The line of demarcation between the two colours, black and blue, showed the point which the pure sea would not pass; but it lay as quiet as the abominable pool, with which it never mixed. Boats without awnings were too hot to touch; ships blistered at their moorings; the stones of the quays had not cooled, night or day, for months. Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genoese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendants from all the builders of Babel, come to trade at Marseilles, sought the shade alike—taking refuge in any hiding-place from a sea too intensely blue to be looked at, and a sky of purple, set with one great flaming jewel of fire.

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

Blinds, shutters, curtains, awnings, were all closed and drawn to keep out the stare. Grant it but a chink or keyhole, and it shot in like a white-hot arrow. The churches were the freest from it. To come out of the twilight of pillars and arches—dreamily dotted with winking lamps, dreamily peopled with ugly old shadows piously dozing, spitting, and begging—was to plunge into a fiery river, and swim for life to the nearest strip of shade. So, with people lounging and lying wherever shade was, with but little hum of tongues or barking of dogs, with occasional jangling of discordant church bells and rattling of vicious drums, Marseilles, a fact to be strongly smelt and tasted, lay broiling in the sun one day. In Marseilles that day there was a villainous prison. In one of its chambers, so repulsive a place that even the obtrusive stare blinked at it, and left it to such refuse of reflected light as it could

find for itself, were two men. Besides the two men, a notched and disfigured bench, immovable from the wall, with a draught-board rudely hacked upon it with a knife, a set of draughts, made of old buttons and soup bones, a set of dominoes, two mats, and two or three wine bottles. That was all the chamber held, exclusive of rats and other unseen vermin, in addition to the seen vermin, the two men.

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

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

The man who lay on the ledge of the grating was even chilled. He jerked his great cloak more heavily upon him by an impatient

movement of one shoulder, and growled, 'To the devil with this Brigand of a Sun that never shines in here!'

He was waiting to be fed, looking sideways through the bars that he might see the further down the stairs, with much of the expression of a wild beast in similar expectation. But his eyes, too close together, were not so nobly set in his head as those of the king of beasts are in his, and they were sharp rather than bright—pointed weapons with little surface to betray them. They had no depth or change; they glittered, and they opened and shut. So far, and waiving their use to himself, a clockmaker could have made a better pair. He had a hook nose, handsome after its kind, but too high between the eyes by probably just as much as his eyes were too near to one another. For the rest, he was large and tall in frame, had thin lips, where his thick moustache showed them at all, and a quantity of dry hair, of no definable colour, in its shaggy state, but shot with red. The hand with which he held the grating (seamed all over the back with ugly scratches newly healed), was unusually small and plump; would have been unusually white but for the prison grime. The other man was lying on the stone floor, covered with a coarse brown coat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

'How can I say? I always know what the hour is, and where I am. I was brought in here at night, and out of a boat, but I know where I am. See here! Marseilles harbour;' on his knees on the pavement, mapping it all out with a swarthy forefinger; 'Toulon (where the galleys are), Spain over there, Algiers over there. Creeping away to the left here, Nice. Round by the Cornice to Genoa. Genoa Mole and Harbour. Quarantine Ground. City there; terrace gardens blushing with the bella donna. Here, Porto Fino. Stand out for Leghorn. Out again for Civita Vecchia, so away to—hey! there's no room for Naples;' he had got to the wall by this time; 'but it's all one; it's in there!'

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

'Judge if I come back from Naples as I went! See here, my master! Civita Vecchia, Leghorn, Porto Fino, Genoa, Cornice, Off Nice (which is in there), Marseilles, you and me. The apartment of the jailer and his keys is where I put this thumb; and here at my

wrist they keep the national razor in its case—the guillotine locked up.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Poor birds!' said the child.

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

'Stay!' said the jailer, putting his little daughter on the outer ledge of the grate, 'she shall feed the birds. This big loaf is for Signor John Baptist. We must break it to get it through into the cage. So, there's a tame bird to kiss the little hand! This sausage in a vine leaf is for Monsieur Rigaud. Again—this veal in savoury jelly is for Monsieur Rigaud. Again—these three white little loaves are for Monsieur Rigaud. Again, this cheese—again, this wine—again, this tobacco—all for Monsieur Rigaud. Lucky bird!'

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

When Monsieur Rigaud laughed, a change took place in his face, that was more remarkable than prepossessing. His moustache

went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache, in a very sinister and cruel manner.

'There!' said the jailer, turning his basket upside down to beat the crumbs out, 'I have expended all the money I received; here is the note of it, and that's a thing accomplished. Monsieur Rigaud, as I expected yesterday, the President will look for the pleasure of your society at an hour after mid-day, to-day.'

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

'You have said it. To try you.'

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

The jailer shrugged his shoulders.

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

'What do I know!' cried the jailer, turning upon him with southern quickness, and gesticulating with both his hands and all his fingers, as if he were threatening to tear him to pieces. 'My friend, how is it possible for me to tell how long you are to lie here? What do I know, John Baptist Cavalletto? Death of my life! There are prisoners here sometimes, who are not in such a devil of a hurry to be tried.' He seemed to glance obliquely at Monsieur Rigaud in this remark; but Monsieur Rigaud had already resumed his meal, though not with quite so quick an appetite as before.

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

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

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

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'Who passes by this road so late?
     Compagnon de la Majolaine!
Who passes by this road so late?
     Always gay!'
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that John Baptist felt it a point of honour to reply at the grate, and in good time and tune, though a little hoarsely:

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'Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,
     Compagnon de la Majolaine!
Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,
     Always gay!'
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which accompanied them so far down the few steep stairs, that the prison-keeper had to stop at last for his little daughter to hear the song out, and repeat the Refrain while they were yet in sight. Then the child's head disappeared, and the prison-keeper's head disappeared, but the little voice prolonged the strain until the door clashed.

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

Perhaps he glanced at the Lyons sausage, and perhaps he glanced at the veal in savoury jelly, but they were not there long, to make his mouth water; Monsieur Rigaud soon dispatched them, in spite of the president and tribunal, and proceeded to

suck his fingers as clean as he could, and to wipe them on his vine leaves. Then, as he paused in his drink to contemplate his fellow-prisoner, his moustache went up, and his nose came down.

'How do you find the bread?'

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

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

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

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

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

The little man obeyed his orders, and stood ready to give him a lighted match; for he was now rolling his tobacco into cigarettes by the aid of little squares of paper which had been brought in with it.

'Here! You may have one.'

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

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

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

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

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

'Surely, surely!'

'How long have we been here?' 'I, eleven weeks, to-morrow night at midnight. You, nine weeks and three days, at five this afternoon.'

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

'Never!'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Good! The President will have a gentleman before him soon. Come!

Shall I tell you on what accusation? It must be now, or never, for I shall not return here. Either I shall go free, or I shall go to be made ready for shaving. You know where they keep the razor.'

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

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

His theatrical air, as he stood with one arm on his hip within the folds of his cloak, together with his manner of disregarding his companion and addressing the opposite wall instead, seemed to intimate that he was rehearsing for the President, whose examination he was shortly to undergo, rather than troubling himself merely to enlighten so small a person as John Baptist Cavalletto.

'Call me five-and-thirty years of age. I have seen the world. I have lived here, and lived there, and lived like a gentleman everywhere. I have been treated and respected as a gentleman universally. If you try to prejudice me by making out that I have

lived by my wits—how do your lawyers live—your politicians—your intriguers—your men of the Exchange?'

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

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

John Baptist having smoked his cigarette down to his fingers' ends, Monsieur Rigaud had the magnanimity to throw him another. He lighted the second at the ashes of the first, and smoked on, looking sideways at his companion, who, preoccupied with his own case, hardly looked at him.

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

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

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

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

'Now came the difficulties of our position. I am proud. I say nothing in defence of pride, but I am proud. It is also my character to govern. I can't submit; I must govern. Unfortunately, the property of Madame Rigaud was settled upon herself. Such was the insane act of her late husband. More unfortunately still, she had relations. When a wife's relations interpose against a husband who is a gentleman, who is proud, and who must govern, the consequences are inimical to peace. There was yet another source of difference between us. Madame Rigaud was unfortunately a little vulgar. I sought to improve her manners and ameliorate her general tone; she (supported in this likewise by her relations) resented my endeavours. Quarrels began to arise between us; and, propagated and exaggerated by the slanders of the relations of Madame Rigaud, to become notorious to the neighbours. It has been said that I treated Madame Rigaud with cruelty. I may have been seen to slap her face—nothing more. I have a light hand; and if I have been seen apparently to correct Madame Rigaud in that manner, I have done it almost playfully.'

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

'I am sensitive and brave. I do not advance it as a merit to be sensitive and brave, but it is my character. If the male relations of Madame Rigaud had put themselves forward openly, I should have known how to deal with them. They knew that, and their machinations were conducted in secret; consequently, Madame Rigaud and I were brought into frequent and unfortunate collision. Even when I wanted any little sum of money for my personal expenses, I could not obtain it without collision—and I, too, a man whose character it is to govern! One night, Madame Rigaud and myself were walking amicably—I may say like lovers—on a height overhanging the sea. An evil star occasioned Madame Rigaud to advert to her relations; I reasoned with her on that subject, and remonstrated on the want of duty and devotion manifested in her allowing herself to be influenced by their jealous animosity towards her husband. Madame Rigaud retorted; I retorted; Madame Rigaud grew warm; I grew warm, and provoked her. I admit it. Frankness is a part of my character. At length, Madame Rigaud, in an access of fury that I must ever deplore, threw herself upon me with screams of passion (no doubt those that were overheard at some distance), tore my clothes, tore my hair, lacerated my hands, trampled and trod the dust, and finally leaped over, dashing herself to death upon the rocks below. Such is the train of incidents which malice has perverted into my endeavouring to force from Madame Rigaud a relinquishment of her rights; and, on her persistence in a refusal to make the concession I required, struggling with her—assassinating her!'

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

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

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

'What do you mean?' John Baptist polished his knife in silence.

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

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

'What then?'

'Presidents and tribunals are so prejudiced.'

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

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

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

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

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

'I am to depart in state, I see?' 'Why, unless you did,' returned the jailer, 'you might depart in so many pieces that it would be difficult to get you together again. There's a crowd, Monsieur Rigaud, and it doesn't love you.'

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

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

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

beyond, he passed those few moments in watching and peering, until the door was closed upon him.

There was an officer in command of the soldiers; a stout, serviceable, profoundly calm man, with his drawn sword in his hand, smoking a cigar. He very briefly directed the placing of Monsieur Rigaud in the midst of the party, put himself with consummate indifference at their head, gave the word 'march!' and so they all went jingling down the staircase. The door clashed—the key turned—and a ray of unusual light, and a breath of unusual air, seemed to have passed through the jail, vanishing in a tiny wreath of smoke from the cigar.

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

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

bed, making exemplary ends and sounding speeches; and polite history, more servile than their instruments, embalming them!

At last, John Baptist, now able to choose his own spot within the compass of those walls for the exercise of his faculty of going to sleep when he would, lay down upon the bench, with his face turned over on his crossed arms, and slumbered. In his submission, in his lightness, in his good humour, in his short-lived passion, in his easy contentment with hard bread and hard stones, in his ready sleep, in his fits and starts, altogether a true son of the land that gave him birth.

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

CHAPTER 2 FELLOW TRAVELLERS

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

'I have heard none.'

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

'Most people do, I suppose.'

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

'Do you mean the Marseilles people?'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'It has had the result of making even quarantine enjoyable.' 'Come!' said Mr Meagles, 'that's something to be sure. I am obliged to you for that remark. Now, Pet, my darling, you had better go along with Mother and get ready for the boat. The officer

of health, and a variety of humbugs in cocked hats, are coming off to let us out of this at last: and all we jail-birds are to breakfast together in something approaching to a Christian style again, before we take wing for our different destinations. Tattycoram, stick you close to your young mistress.'

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

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

'Not at all,' said Mr Meagles.

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

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

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

'I thought,' said the other, 'that—'

'Tattycoram?' suggested Mr Meagles again.

'Thank you—that Tattycoram was a name; and I have several times wondered at the oddity of it.'

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

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

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

'I have seen it.'

'Well! One day when we took Pet to church there to hear the music—because, as practical people, it is the business of our lives to show her everything that we think can please her—Mother (my usual name for Mrs Meagles) began to cry so, that it was necessary to take her out. "What's the matter, Mother?" said I, when we had brought her a little round: "you are frightening Pet, my dear." "Yes, I know that, Father," says Mother, "but I think it's through my loving her so much, that it ever came into my head." "That ever what came into your head, Mother?" "O dear, dear!" cried Mother, breaking out again, "when I saw all those children ranged tier above tier, and appealing from the father none of them has ever known on earth, to the great Father of us all in Heaven, I thought, does any wretched mother ever come here, and look among those young faces, wondering which is the poor child she brought into this forlorn world, never through all its life to know her love, her kiss, her face, her voice, even her name!" Now that was practical in Mother, and I told her so. I said, "Mother, that's what I call practical in you, my dear."'

The other, not unmoved, assented.

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

'And the name itself—'

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

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

'Then,' said Mr Meagles, laying his forefinger on his companion's breast with great animation, 'don't you see a beadle, now, if you can help it. Whenever I see a beadle in full fig, coming

down a street on a Sunday at the head of a charity school, I am obliged to turn and run away, or I should hit him. The name of Beadle being out of the question, and the originator of the Institution for these poor foundlings having been a blessed creature of the name of Coram, we gave that name to Pet's little maid. At one time she was Tatty, and at one time she was Coram, until we got into a way of mixing the two names together, and now she is always Tattycoram.'

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

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

'I am afraid I have inadvertently touched upon a tender theme.'

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

'Ah! indeed, indeed!'

'Yes, and being practical people, a result has gradually sprung up in the minds of Mrs Meagles and myself which perhaps you may—

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Perhaps I shall.'

'Ay! But I mean with a will.'

'I have no will. That is to say,'—he coloured a little,—'next to none that I can put in action now. Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.'

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

'Ah! Easily said. I am the son, Mr Meagles, of a hard father and mother. I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything; for whom what could not be weighed, measured, and priced, had no existence. Strict people as the phrase is, professors of a stern religion, their very religion was a gloomy sacrifice of tastes and sympathies that were never their

own, offered up as a part of a bargain for the security of their possessions. Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance in this world and terror in the next—nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere—this was my childhood, if I may so misuse the word as to apply it to such a beginning of life.'

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

'If the people who are usually called practical, were practical in your direction—'

'Why, so they are!' said Mr Meagles.

'Are they indeed?'

'Well, I suppose so,' returned Mr Meagles, thinking about it. 'Eh?

One can but be practical, and Mrs Meagles and myself are nothing else.'

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

The boat was filled with the cocked hats to which Mr Meagles entertained a national objection; and the wearers of those cocked hats landed and came up the steps, and all the impounded travellers congregated together. There was then a mighty production of papers on the part of the cocked hats, and a calling over of names, and great work of signing, sealing, stamping,

inking, and sanding, with exceedingly blurred, gritty, and undecipherable results. Finally, everything was done according to rule, and the travellers were at liberty to depart whithersoever they would.

They made little account of stare and glare, in the new pleasure of recovering their freedom, but flitted across the harbour in gay boats, and reassembled at a great hotel, whence the sun was excluded by closed lattices, and where bare paved floors, lofty ceilings, and resounding corridors tempered the intense heat. There, a great table in a great room was soon profusely covered with a superb repast; and the quarantine quarters became bare indeed, remembered among dainty dishes, southern fruits, cooled wines, flowers from Genoa, snow from the mountain tops, and all the colours of the rainbow flashing in the mirrors.

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

They were about thirty in company, and all talking; but necessarily in groups. Father and Mother Meagles sat with their daughter between them, the last three on one side of the table: on the opposite side sat Mr Clennam; a tall French gentleman with raven hair and beard, of a swart and terrible, not to say genteelly diabolical aspect, but who had shown himself the mildest of men; and a handsome young Englishwoman, travelling quite alone, who had a proud observant face, and had either withdrawn herself from the rest or been avoided by the rest—nobody, herself excepted perhaps, could have quite decided which. The rest of the party were of the usual materials: travellers on business, and

travellers for pleasure; officers from India on leave; merchants in the Greek and Turkey trades; a clerical English husband in a meek strait-waistcoat, on a wedding trip with his young wife; a majestic English mama and papa, of the patrician order, with a family of three growing-up daughters, who were keeping a journal for the confusion of their fellow-creatures; and a deaf old English mother, tough in travel, with a very decidedly grown-up daughter indeed, which daughter went sketching about the universe in the expectation of ultimately toning herself off into the married state.

The reserved Englishwoman took up Mr Meagles in his last remark. 'Do you mean that a prisoner forgives his prison?' said she, slowly and with emphasis.

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

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

'I do.'

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

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

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

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

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

'If I had been shut up in any place to pine and suffer, I should always hate that place and wish to burn it down, or raze it to the ground. I know no more.' 'Strong, sir?' said Mr Meagles to the Frenchman; it being another of his habits to address individuals of all nations in idiomatic English, with a perfect conviction that they were bound to understand it somehow. 'Rather forcible in our fair friend, you'll agree with me, I think?'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'I? No.'

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

'I thank him, but I know there can be none.'

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

'Indeed!'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet us, from many strange places and by many strange roads,' was the composed reply; 'and what it is set to us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done.' There was something in the manner of these words that jarred upon Pet's ear. It implied that what was to be done was necessarily evil, and it caused her to say in a whisper, 'O Father!' and to shrink childishly, in her spoilt way, a little closer to him. This was not lost on the speaker.

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

With the coldest of farewells, and with a certain worn expression on her beauty that gave it, though scarcely yet in its prime, a wasted look, she left the room.

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

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

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

'My poor girl, what is the matter?'

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

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

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

'Afraid of me?'

'Yes. You seem to come like my own anger, my own malice, my own—whatever it is—I don't know what it is. But I am ill-used, I

am ill-used, I am ill-used!' Here the sobs and the tears, and the tearing hand, which had all been suspended together since the first surprise, went on together anew.

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

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

'You must have patience.'

'I WON'T have patience!'

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

I WILL mind it.'

'Hush! Be more prudent. You forget your dependent position.'

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

The observer stood with her hand upon her own bosom, looking at the girl, as one afflicted with a diseased part might curiously watch the dissection and exposition of an analogous case.

The girl raged and battled with all the force of her youth and fulness of life, until by little and little her passionate exclamations trailed off into broken murmurs as if she were in pain. By

corresponding degrees she sank into a chair, then upon her knees, then upon the ground beside the bed, drawing the coverlet with her, half to hide her shamed head and wet hair in it, and half, as it seemed, to embrace it, rather than have nothing to take to her repentant breast.

'Go away from me, go away from me! When my temper comes upon me, I am mad. I know I might keep it off if I only tried hard enough, and sometimes I do try hard enough, and at other times I don't and won't. What have I said! I knew when I said it, it was all lies. They think I am being taken care of somewhere, and have all I want.

They are nothing but good to me. I love them dearly; no people could ever be kinder to a thankless creature than they always are to me. Do, do go away, for I am afraid of you. I am afraid of myself when I feel my temper coming, and I am as much afraid of you. Go away from me, and let me pray and cry myself better!' The day passed on; and again the wide stare stared itself out; and the hot night was on Marseilles; and through it the caravan of the morning, all dispersed, went their appointed ways. And thus ever by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life.

CHAPTER 3. HOME

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

At such a happy time, so propitious to the interests of religion and morality, Mr Arthur Clennam, newly arrived from Marseilles by way of Dover, and by Dover coach the Blue-eyed Maid, sat in the window of a coffee-house on Ludgate Hill. Ten thousand responsible houses surrounded him, frowning as heavily on the streets they composed, as if they were every one inhabited by the ten young men of the Calender's story, who blackened their faces

and bemoaned their miseries every night. Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him where people lived so unwholesomely that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning; albeit my lord, their county member, was amazed that they failed to sleep in company with their butcher's meat. Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away towards every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river. What secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labour, six days in the week, lay among these Arcadian objects, from the sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave—what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day? Clearly they could want nothing but a stringent policeman.

Mr Arthur Clennam sat in the window of the coffee-house on Ludgate Hill, counting one of the neighbouring bells, making sentences and burdens of songs out of it in spite of himself, and wondering how many sick people it might be the death of in the course of the year. As the hour approached, its changes of measure made it more and more exasperating. At the quarter, it went off into a condition of deadly-lively importunity, urging the populace in a voluble manner to Come to church, Come to church, Come to church! At the ten minutes, it became aware that the congregation would be scanty, and slowly hammered out in low spirits, They WON'T come, they WON'T come, they WON'T come! At the five minutes, it abandoned hope, and shook every house in the neighbourhood for three hundred seconds, with one dismal swing per second, as a groan of despair.

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

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

There was the dreary Sunday of his childhood, when he sat with his hands before him, scared out of his senses by a horrible tract which commenced business with the poor child by asking him in its title, why he was going to Perdition?—a piece of curiosity that he really, in a frock and drawers, was not in a condition to satisfy—and which, for the further attraction of his infant mind, had a parenthesis in every other line with some such hiccupping reference as 2 Ep. Thess. c. iii, v. 6 & 7. There was the sleepy Sunday of his boyhood, when, like a military deserter, he was marched to chapel by a picquet of teachers three times a day, morally handcuffed to another boy; and when he would willingly have bartered two meals of indigestible sermon for another ounce or two of inferior mutton at his scanty dinner in the flesh. There was the interminable Sunday of his nonage; when his mother, stern of face and unrelenting of heart, would sit all day behind a Bible—bound, like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest, and straitest boards, with one dinted ornament on the cover like the drag of a chain, and a wrathful sprinkling of red upon the edges of the leaves—as if it, of all books! were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection, and gentle intercourse. There was the resentful Sunday of a little later, when he sat down glowering and glooming through the tardy length of the day, with a sullen sense of injury in his heart, and no more real knowledge of the beneficent history of the New

Testament than if he had been bred among idolaters. There was a legion of Sundays, all days of unserviceable bitterness and mortification, slowly passing before him. 'Beg pardon, sir,' said a brisk waiter, rubbing the table. 'Wish see bed-room?'

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

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

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

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

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

being suffered to introduce any show of brightness into such a dismal scene.

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

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

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

He went up to the door, which had a projecting canopy in carved work of festooned jack-towels and children's heads with water on the brain, designed after a once-popular monumental pattern, and knocked. A shuffling step was soon heard on the stone floor of the hall, and the door was opened by an old man, bent and dried, but with keen eyes.

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

Mr Arthur stepped in and shut the door.

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

'How is my mother?'

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

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

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

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

'Will you tell her that I have come home?'

'Yes, Arthur, yes. Oh, to be sure! I'll tell her that you have come home. Please to wait here. You won't find the room changed.'

He took another candle from a cupboard, lighted it, left the first on the table, and went upon his errand. He was a short, bald old man, in a high-shouldered black coat and waistcoat, drab breeches, and long drab gaiters. He might, from his dress, have been either clerk or servant, and in fact had long been both. There was nothing about him in the way of decoration but a watch, which was lowered into the depths of its proper pocket by an old black ribbon, and had a tarnished copper key moored above it, to show where it was sunk. His head was awry, and he had a one-sided, crab-like way with him, as if his foundations had yielded at about the same time as those of the house, and he ought to have been propped up in a similar manner.

'How weak am I,' said Arthur Clennam, when he was gone, 'that I could shed tears at this reception! I, who have never experienced anything else; who have never expected anything else.' He not only could, but did. It was the momentary yielding of a nature that had been disappointed from the dawn of its perceptions, but had not quite given up all its hopeful yearnings yet. He subdued it, took up the candle, and examined the room. The old articles of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Do you never leave your room, mother?'

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

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

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

The cracked voice replied that it was Affery: and an old woman came forward into what doubtful light there was, and kissed her hand once; then subsided again into the dimness.

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

'Yes, mother.'

'Does it snow?'

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

'All seasons are alike to me,' she returned, with a grim kind of luxuriousness. 'I know nothing of summer and winter, shut up here.

The Lord has been pleased to put me beyond all that.' With her cold grey eyes and her cold grey hair, and her immovable face, as stiff as the folds of her stony head-dress,—her being beyond the reach of the seasons seemed but a fit sequence to her being beyond the reach of all changing emotions.

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

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

'You see.'

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

'I keep it here as a remembrance of your father.'

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

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

'No. He was quite sensible at that time.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'No, Affery, no supper.'

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

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

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

No; nor would he have that, either.

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

'Yes, yes.'

'Well then, don't you be cowed. You're clever, Arthur, an't you?' He nodded, as she seemed to expect an answer in the affirmative. 'Then stand up against them! She's awful clever, and none but a clever one durst say a word to her. HE'S a clever one—oh, he's a clever one!—and he gives it her when he has a mind to't, he does!'

'Your husband does?'

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

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

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

Master Arthur repeated his recent refusal to pick at anything.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They mounted up and up, through the musty smell of an old close house, little used, to a large garret bed-room. Meagre and spare, like all the other rooms, it was even uglier and grimmer than the rest, by being the place of banishment for the worn-out furniture. Its movables were ugly old chairs with worn-out seats, and ugly old chairs without any seats; a threadbare patternless carpet, a maimed table, a crippled wardrobe, a lean set of fire-irons like the skeleton of a set deceased, a washing-stand that looked as if it had stood for ages in a hail of dirty soapsuds, and a bedstead with four bare atomies of posts, each terminating in a spike, as if for the dismal accommodation of lodgers who might prefer to impale themselves. Arthur opened the long low window, and looked out upon the old blasted and blackened forest of chimneys, and the old red glare in the sky, which had seemed to him once upon a time but a nightly reflection of the fiery environment that was presented to his childish fancy in all directions, let it look where it would.

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

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

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

'How did it happen?'

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

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

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

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

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

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

'How could you help yourself from being married!'

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Well?'

'Well?' repeated Mrs Flintwinch, 'I think so! I sits me down and says it. Well!—Jeremiah then says to me, "As to banns, next Sunday being the third time of asking (for I've put 'em up a fortnight), is my reason for naming Monday. She'll speak to you

about it herself, and now she'll find you prepared, Affery." That same day she spoke to me, and she said, "So, Affery, I understand that you and Jeremiah are going to be married. I am glad of it, and so are you, with reason. It is a very good thing for you, and very welcome under the circumstances to me. He is a sensible man, and a trustworthy man, and a persevering man, and a pious man." What could I say when it had come to that? Why, if it had been—a smothering instead of a wedding,' Mrs Flintwinch cast about in her mind with great pains for this form of expression, 'I couldn't have said a word upon it, against them two clever ones.'

'In good faith, I believe so.' 'And so you may, Arthur.'

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

'Girl?' said Mrs Flintwinch in a rather sharp key.

'It was a girl, surely, whom I saw near you—almost hidden in the dark corner?'

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

'I suffered enough from my mother's separating us, to remember her.

I recollect her very well.'

'Have you got another?'

'No.'

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

'And how do you know that, Affery?'

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

Mrs Flintwinch had introduced into the web that his mind was busily weaving, in that old workshop where the loom of his youth had stood, the last thread wanting to the pattern. The airy folly of a boy's love had found its way even into that house, and he had been as wretched under its hopelessness as if the house had been a castle of romance. Little more than a week ago at Marseilles, the face of the pretty girl from whom he had parted with regret, had had an unusual interest for him, and a tender hold upon him, because of some resemblance, real or imagined, to this first face that had soared out of his gloomy life into the bright glories of fancy. He leaned upon the sill of the long low window, and looking out upon the blackened forest of chimneys again, began to dream; for it had been the uniform tendency of this man's life—so much was wanting in it to think about, so much that might have been better directed and happier to speculate upon—to make him a dreamer, after all.

CHAPTER 4. MRS FLINTWINCH HAS A DREAM

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

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

Having got her mistress into bed, lighted her lamp, and given her good night, Mrs Flintwinch went to roost as usual, saving that her lord had not yet appeared. It was her lord himself who became—unlike the last theme in the mind, according to the observation of most philosophers—the subject of Mrs Flintwinch's dream. It seemed to her that she awoke after sleeping some hours, and found Jeremiah not yet abed. That she looked at the candle

she had left burning, and, measuring the time like King Alfred the Great, was confirmed by its wasted state in her belief that she had been asleep for some considerable period. That she arose thereupon, muffled herself up in a wrapper, put on her shoes, and went out on the staircase, much surprised, to look for Jeremiah.

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

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

For, Mr Flintwinch awake, was watching Mr Flintwinch asleep. He sat on one side of the small table, looking keenly at himself on the other side with his chin sunk on his breast, snoring. The waking Flintwinch had his full front face presented to his wife; the sleeping Flintwinch was in profile. The waking Flintwinch was the old original; the sleeping Flintwinch was the double, just as she might have distinguished between a tangible object and its reflection in a glass, Affery made out this difference with her head going round and round.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He took a sip.

'Your health!'

He took another sip.

'His health!'

He took another sip.

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

But now came the most remarkable part of the dream. She felt so afraid of her husband, that being on the staircase, she had not the power to retreat to her room (which she might easily have done before he had fastened the door), but stood there staring. Consequently when he came up the staircase to bed, candle in hand, he came full upon her. He looked astonished, but said not a word. He kept his eyes upon her, and kept advancing; and she, completely under his influence, kept retiring before him. Thus, she walking backward and he walking forward, they came into their own room. They were no sooner shut in there, than Mr Flintwinch took her by the throat, and shook her until she was black in the face.

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

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

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

Mrs Flintwinch thanked him and crept into bed.

End of Book Preview