

## Chapter XXXII - More Fortune-Telling

Maggy sat at her work in her great white cap with its quantity of opaque frilling hiding what profile she had (she had none to spare), and her serviceable eye brought to bear upon her occupation, on the window side of the room. What with her flapping cap, and what with her unserviceable eye, she was quite partitioned off from her Little Mother, whose seat was opposite the window. The tread and shuffle of feet on the pavement of the yard had much diminished since the taking of the Chair, the tide of Collegians having set strongly in the direction of Harmony. Some few who had no music in their souls, or no money in their pockets, dawdled about; and the old spectacle of the visitor-wife and the depressed unseasoned prisoner still lingered in corners, as broken cobwebs and such unsightly discomforts draggle in corners of other places. It was the quietest time the College knew, saving the night hours when the Collegians took the benefit of the act of sleep. The occasional rattle of applause upon the tables of the Snuggery, denoted the successful termination of a morsel of Harmony; or the responsive acceptance, by the united children, of some toast or sentiment offered to them by their Father. Occasionally, a vocal strain more sonorous than the generality informed the listener that some boastful bass was in blue water, or in the hunting field, or with the reindeer, or on the mountain, or among the heather; but the Marshal of the Marshalsea knew better, and had got him hard and fast.

As Arthur Clennam moved to sit down by the side of Little Dorrit, she trembled so that she had much ado to hold her needle. Clennam gently put his hand upon her work, and said, 'Dear Little Dorrit, let me lay it down.'

She yielded it to him, and he put it aside. Her hands were then nervously clasping together, but he took one of them. 'How seldom I have seen you lately, Little Dorrit!'

'I have been busy, sir.'

'But I heard only to-day,' said Clennam, 'by mere accident, of your having been with those good people close by me. Why not come to me, then?'

'I - I don't know. Or rather, I thought you might be busy too. You generally are now, are you not?'

He saw her trembling little form and her downcast face, and the eyes that drooped the moment they were raised to his - he saw them almost with as much concern as tenderness.

'My child, your manner is so changed!'

The trembling was now quite beyond her control. Softly withdrawing her hand, and laying it in her other hand, she sat before him with her head bent and her whole form trembling.

'My own Little Dorrit,' said Clennam, compassionately.

She burst into tears. Maggy looked round of a sudden, and stared for at least a minute; but did not interpose. Clennam waited some little while before he spoke again.

'I cannot bear,' he said then, 'to see you weep; but I hope this is a relief to an overcharged heart.'

'Yes it is, sir. Nothing but that.'

'Well, well! I feared you would think too much of what passed here just now. It is of no moment; not the least. I am only unfortunate to have come in the way. Let it go by with these tears. It is not worth one of them. One of them? Such an idle thing should be repeated, with my glad consent, fifty times a day, to save you a moment's heart-ache, Little Dorrit.'

She had taken courage now, and answered, far more in her usual manner, 'You are so good! But even if there was nothing else in it to be sorry for and ashamed of, it is such a bad return to you - '

'Hush!' said Clennam, smiling and touching her lips with his hand. 'Forgetfulness in you who remember so many and so much, would be new indeed. Shall I remind you that I am not, and that I never was, anything but the friend whom you agreed to trust? No. You remember it, don't you?'

'I try to do so, or I should have broken the promise just now, when my mistaken brother was here. You will consider his bringing-up in this place, and will not judge him hardly, poor fellow, I know!' In raising her eyes with these words, she observed his face more nearly than she had done yet, and said, with a quick change of tone, 'You have not been ill, Mr Clennam?'

'No.'

'Nor tried? Nor hurt?' she asked him, anxiously.

It fell to Clennam now, to be not quite certain how to answer. He said in reply:

'To speak the truth, I have been a little troubled, but it is over.'

Do I show it so plainly? I ought to have more fortitude and self-command than that. I thought I had. I must learn them of you. Who could teach me better!

He never thought that she saw in him what no one else could see. He never thought that in the whole world there were no other eyes that looked upon him with the same light and strength as hers.

'But it brings me to something that I wish to say,' he continued, 'and therefore I will not quarrel even with my own face for telling tales and being unfaithful to me. Besides, it is a privilege and pleasure to confide in my Little Dorrit. Let me confess then, that, forgetting how grave I was, and how old I was, and how the time for such things had gone by me with the many years of sameness and little happiness that made up my long life far away, without marking it - that, forgetting all this, I fancied I loved some one.'

'Do I know her, sir?' asked Little Dorrit.

'No, my child.'

'Not the lady who has been kind to me for your sake?'

'Flora. No, no. Do you think - '

'I never quite thought so,' said Little Dorrit, more to herself than him. 'I did wonder at it a little.'

'Well!' said Clennam, abiding by the feeling that had fallen on him in the avenue on the night of the roses, the feeling that he was an older man, who had done with that tender part of life, 'I found out my mistake, and I thought about it a little - in short, a good deal - and got wiser. Being wiser, I counted up my years and considered what I am, and looked back, and looked forward, and found that I should soon be grey. I found that I had climbed the hill, and passed the level ground upon the top, and was descending quickly.'

If he had known the sharpness of the pain he caused the patient heart, in speaking thus! While doing it, too, with the purpose of easing and serving her.

'I found that the day when any such thing would have been graceful in me, or good in me, or hopeful or happy for me or any one in connection with me, was gone, and would never shine again.'

O! If he had known, if he had known! If he could have seen the dagger in his hand, and the cruel wounds it struck in the faithful bleeding breast of his Little Dorrit!

'All that is over, and I have turned my face from it. Why do I speak of this to Little Dorrit? Why do I show you, my child, the space of years that there is between us, and recall to you that I have passed, by the amount of your whole life, the time that is present to you?'

'Because you trust me, I hope. Because you know that nothing can touch you without touching me; that nothing can make you happy or unhappy, but it must make me, who am so grateful to you, the same.'

He heard the thrill in her voice, he saw her earnest face, he saw her clear true eyes, he saw the quickened bosom that would have joyfully thrown itself before him to receive a mortal wound directed at his breast, with the dying cry, 'I love him!' and the remotest suspicion of the truth never dawned upon his mind. No. He saw the devoted little creature with her worn shoes, in her common dress, in her jail-home; a slender child in body, a strong heroine in soul; and the light of her domestic story made all else dark to him.

'For those reasons assuredly, Little Dorrit, but for another too. So far removed, so different, and so much older, I am the better fitted for your friend and adviser. I mean, I am the more easily to be trusted; and any little constraint that you might feel with another, may vanish before me. Why have you kept so retired from me? Tell me.'

'I am better here. My place and use are here. I am much better here,' said Little Dorrit, faintly.

'So you said that day upon the bridge. I thought of it much afterwards. Have you no secret you could entrust to me, with hope and comfort, if you would!'

'Secret? No, I have no secret,' said Little Dorrit in some trouble.

They had been speaking in low voices; more because it was natural to what they said to adopt that tone, than with any care to reserve it from Maggy at her work. All of a sudden Maggy stared again, and this time spoke:

'I say! Little Mother!'

'Yes, Maggy.'

'If you an't got no secret of your own to tell him, tell him that about the Princess. She had a secret, you know.'

'The Princess had a secret?' said Clennam, in some surprise. 'What Princess was that, Maggy?'

'Lor! How you do go and bother a gal of ten,' said Maggy, 'catching the poor thing up in that way. Whoever said the Princess had a secret? *I* never said so.'

'I beg your pardon. I thought you did.'

'No, I didn't. How could I, when it was her as wanted to find it out? It was the little woman as had the secret, and she was always a spinning at her wheel. And so she says to her, why do you keep it there? And so the t'other one says to her, no I don't; and so the t'other one says to her, yes you do; and then they both goes to the cupboard, and there it is. And she wouldn't go into the Hospital, and so she died. You know, Little Mother; tell him that.

For it was a reg'lar good secret, that was!' cried Maggy, hugging herself.

Arthur looked at Little Dorrit for help to comprehend this, and was struck by seeing her so timid and red. But, when she told him that it was only a Fairy Tale she had one day made up for Maggy, and that there was nothing in it which she wouldn't be ashamed to tell again to anybody else, even if she could remember it, he left the subject where it was.

However, he returned to his own subject by first entreating her to see him oftener, and to remember that it was impossible to have a stronger interest in her welfare than he had, or to be more set upon promoting it than he was. When she answered fervently, she well knew that, she never forgot it, he touched upon his second and more delicate point - the suspicion he had formed.

'Little Dorrit,' he said, taking her hand again, and speaking lower than he had spoken yet, so that even Maggy in the small room could not hear him, 'another word. I have wanted very much to say this to you; I have tried for opportunities. Don't mind me, who, for the matter of years, might be your father or your uncle. Always think of me as quite an old man. I know that all your devotion centres in this room, and that nothing to the last will ever tempt you away from the duties you discharge here. If I were not sure of it, I should, before now, have implored you, and implored your father, to let me make some provision for you in a more suitable place. But you may have an interest - I will not say, now, though even that might be - may have, at another time, an interest in some one else; an interest not incompatible with your affection here.'

She was very, very pale, and silently shook her head.

'It may be, dear Little Dorrit.'

'No. No. No.' She shook her head, after each slow repetition of the word, with an air of quiet desolation that he remembered long afterwards. The time came when he remembered it well, long afterwards, within those prison walls; within that very room.

'But, if it ever should be, tell me so, my dear child. Entrust the truth to me, point out the object of such an interest to me, and I will try with all the zeal, and honour, and friendship and respect that I feel for you, good Little Dorrit of my heart, to do you a lasting service.'

'O thank you, thank you! But, O no, O no, O no!' She said this, looking at him with her work-worn hands folded together, and in the same resigned accents as before.

'I press for no confidence now. I only ask you to repose unhesitating trust in me.'

'Can I do less than that, when you are so good!'

'Then you will trust me fully? Will have no secret unhappiness, or anxiety, concealed from me?'

'Almost none.'

'And you have none now?'

She shook her head. But she was very pale.

'When I lie down to-night, and my thoughts come back - as they will, for they do every night, even when I have not seen you - to this sad place, I may believe that there is no grief beyond this room, now, and its usual occupants, which preys on Little Dorrit's mind?'

She seemed to catch at these words - that he remembered, too, long afterwards - and said, more brightly, 'Yes, Mr Clennam; yes, you may!'

The crazy staircase, usually not slow to give notice when any one was coming up or down, here creaked under a quick tread, and a further sound was heard upon it, as if a little steam-engine with more steam than it knew what to do with, were working towards the room. As it approached, which it did very rapidly, it laboured with increased energy; and, after knocking at the door, it sounded as if it were stooping down and snorting in at the keyhole.

Before Maggy could open the door, Mr Pancks, opening it from without, stood without a hat and with his bare head in the wildest condition, looking at Clennam and Little Dorrit, over her shoulder.

He had a lighted cigar in his hand, and brought with him airs of ale and tobacco smoke.

'Pancks the gipsy,' he observed out of breath, 'fortune-telling.' He stood dingily smiling, and breathing hard at them, with a most curious air; as if, instead of being his proprietor's grubber, he were the triumphant proprietor of the Marshalsea, the Marshal, all the turnkeys, and all the Collegians. In his great self-satisfaction he put his cigar to his lips (being evidently no smoker), and took such a pull at it, with his right eye shut up tight for the purpose, that he underwent a convulsion of shuddering and choking. But even in the midst of that paroxysm, he still essayed to repeat his favourite introduction of himself, 'Pa-ancks the gi-ipsy, fortune-telling.'

'I am spending the evening with the rest of 'em,' said Pancks. 'I've been singing. I've been taking a part in White sand and grey sand. I don't know anything about it. Never mind. I'll take any part in anything. It's all the same, if you're loud enough.'

At first Clennam supposed him to be intoxicated. But he soon perceived that though he might be a little the worse (or better) for ale, the staple of his excitement was not brewed from malt, or distilled from any grain or berry.

'How d'ye do, Miss Dorrit?' said Pancks. 'I thought you wouldn't mind my running round, and looking in for a moment. Mr Clennam I heard was here, from Mr Dorrit. How are you, Sir?'

Clennam thanked him, and said he was glad to see him so gay.

'Gay!' said Pancks. 'I'm in wonderful feather, sir. I can't stop a minute, or I shall be missed, and I don't want 'em to miss me. - Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

He seemed to have an insatiate delight in appealing to her and looking at her; excitedly sticking his hair up at the same moment, like a dark species of cockatoo.

'I haven't been here half an hour. I knew Mr Dorrit was in the chair, and I said, 'I'll go and support him!' I ought to be down in Bleeding Heart Yard by rights; but I can worry them to-morrow. - Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

His little black eyes sparkled electrically. His very hair seemed to sparkle as he roughened it. He was in that highly-charged state that one might have expected to draw sparks and snaps from him by presenting a knuckle to any part of his figure.

'Capital company here,' said Pancks. - 'Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

She was half afraid of him, and irresolute what to say. He laughed, with a nod towards Clennam.

'Don't mind him, Miss Dorrit. He's one of us. We agreed that you shouldn't take on to mind me before people, but we didn't mean Mr Clennam. He's one of us. He's in it. An't you, Mr Clennam? - Eh, Miss Dorrit?' The excitement of this strange creature was fast communicating itself to Clennam. Little Dorrit with amazement, saw this, and observed that they exchanged quick looks.

'I was making a remark,' said Pancks, 'but I declare I forget what it was. Oh, I know! Capital company here. I've been treating 'em all round. - Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

'Very generous of you,' she returned, noticing another of the quick looks between the two.

'Not at all,' said Pancks. 'Don't mention it. I'm coming into my property, that's the fact. I can afford to be liberal. I think I'll give 'em a treat here. Tables laid in the yard. Bread in stacks. Pipes in faggots. Tobacco in hayloads. Roast beef and plum-pudding for every one. Quart of double stout a head. Pint of wine too, if they like it, and the authorities give permission. - Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

She was thrown into such a confusion by his manner, or rather by Clennam's growing understanding of his manner (for she looked to him after every fresh appeal and cockatoo demonstration on the part of Mr Pancks), that she only moved her lips in answer, without forming any word.

'And oh, by-the-bye!' said Pancks, 'you were to live to know what was behind us on that little hand of yours. And so you shall, you shall, my darling. - Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

He had suddenly checked himself. Where he got all the additional black prongs from, that now flew up all over his head like the myriads of points that break out in the large change of a great firework, was a wonderful mystery.

'But I shall be missed;' he came back to that; 'and I don't want 'em to miss me. Mr Clennam, you and I made a bargain. I said you should find me stick to it. You shall find me stick to it now, sir, if you'll step out of the room a moment. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good night. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good fortune.'



He rapidly shook her by both hands, and puffed down stairs. Arthur followed him with such a hurried step, that he had very nearly tumbled over him on the last landing, and rolled him down into the yard.

'What is it, for Heaven's sake!' Arthur demanded, when they burst out there both together.

'Stop a moment, sir. Mr Rugg. Let me introduce him.' With those words he presented another man without a hat, and also with a cigar, and also surrounded with a halo of ale and tobacco smoke, which man, though not so excited as himself, was in a state which would have been akin to lunacy but for its fading into sober method when compared with the rampancy of Mr Pancks. 'Mr Clennam, Mr Rugg,' said Pancks. 'Stop a moment. Come to the pump.'

They adjourned to the pump. Mr Pancks, instantly putting his head under the spout, requested Mr Rugg to take a good strong turn at the handle. Mr Rugg complying to the letter, Mr Pancks came forth snorting and blowing to some purpose, and dried himself on his handkerchief.

'I am the clearer for that,' he gasped to Clennam standing astonished. 'But upon my soul, to hear her father making speeches in that chair, knowing what we know, and to see her up in that room in that dress, knowing what we know, is enough to - give me a back, Mr Rugg - a little higher, sir, - that'll do!'

Then and there, on that Marshalsea pavement, in the shades of evening, did Mr Pancks, of all mankind, fly over the head and shoulders of Mr Rugg of Pentonville, General Agent, Accountant, and Recoverer of Debts. Alighting on his feet, he took Clennam by the button-hole, led him behind the pump, and pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers. Mr Rugg, also, pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers.

'Stay!' said Clennam in a whisper. 'You have made a discovery.'

Mr Pancks answered, with an unction which there is no language to convey, 'We rather think so.'

'Does it implicate any one?'

'How implicate, sir?'

'In any suppression or wrong dealing of any kind?'

'Not a bit of it.'

'Thank God!' said Clennam to himself. 'Now show me.' 'You are to understand' - snorted Pancks, feverishly unfolding papers, and speaking in short high-pressure blasts of sentences, 'Where's the Pedigree? Where's Schedule number four, Mr Rugg? Oh!

all right! Here we are. - You are to understand that we are this very day virtually complete. We shan't be legally for a day or two. Call it at the outside a week. We've been at it night and day for I don't know how long. Mr Rugg, you know how long? Never mind. Don't say. You'll only confuse me. You shall tell her, Mr Clennam. Not till we give you leave. Where's that rough total, Mr Rugg? Oh! Here we are! There sir! That's what you'll have to break to her. That man's your Father of the Marshalsea!