Chapter XLV - Appearance And Disappearance

'Arthur, my dear boy,' said Mr Meagles, on the evening of the following day, 'Mother and I have been talking this over, and we don't feel comfortable in remaining as we are. That elegant connection of ours - that dear lady who was here yesterday - '

'I understand,' said Arthur.

'Even that affable and condescending ornament of society,' pursued Mr Meagles, 'may misrepresent us, we are afraid. We could bear a great deal, Arthur, for her sake; but we think we would rather not bear that, if it was all the same to her.'

'Good,' said Arthur. 'Go on.'

'You see,' proceeded Mr Meagles 'it might put us wrong with our son-in-law, it might even put us wrong with our daughter, and it might lead to a great deal of domestic trouble. You see, don't you?'

'Yes, indeed,' returned Arthur, 'there is much reason in what you say.' He had glanced at Mrs Meagles, who was always on the good and sensible side; and a petition had shone out of her honest face that he would support Mr Meagles in his present inclinings.

'So we are very much disposed, are Mother and I,' said Mr Meagles, 'to pack up bags and baggage and go among the Allongers and Marshongers once more. I mean, we are very much disposed to be off, strike right through France into Italy, and see our Pet.'

'And I don't think,' replied Arthur, touched by the motherly anticipation in the bright face of Mrs Meagles (she must have been very like her daughter, once), 'that you could do better. And if you ask me for my advice, it is that you set off to-morrow.'

'Is it really, though?' said Mr Meagles. 'Mother, this is being backed in an idea!'

Mother, with a look which thanked Clennam in a manner very agreeable to him, answered that it was indeed.

'The fact is, besides, Arthur,' said Mr Meagles, the old cloud coming over his face, 'that my son-in-law is already in debt again, and that I suppose I must clear him again. It may be as well, even on this account, that I should step over there, and look him up in a friendly way. Then again, here's Mother foolishly anxious (and yet naturally too) about Pet's state of health, and that she should not be left to feel lonesome at the present time. It's undeniably a long way off, Arthur,

and a strange place for the poor love under all the circumstances. Let her be as well cared for as any lady in that land, still it is a long way off. just as Home is Home though it's never so Homely, why you see,' said Mr Meagles, adding a new version to the proverb, 'Rome is Rome, though it's never so Romely.'

'All perfectly true,' observed Arthur, 'and all sufficient reasons for going.'

'I am glad you think so; it decides me. Mother, my dear, you may get ready. We have lost our pleasant interpreter (she spoke three foreign languages beautifully, Arthur; you have heard her many a time), and you must pull me through it, Mother, as well as you can.

I require a deal of pulling through, Arthur,' said Mr Meagles, shaking his head, 'a deal of pulling through. I stick at everything beyond a noun-substantive - and I stick at him, if he's at all a tight one.'

'Now I think of it,' returned Clennam, 'there's Cavalletto. He shall go with you, if you like. I could not afford to lose him, but you will bring him safe back.'

'Well! I am much obliged to you, my boy,' said Mr Meagles, turning it over, 'but I think not. No, I think I'll be pulled through by Mother. Cavallooro (I stick at his very name to start with, and it sounds like the chorus to a comic song) is so necessary to you, that I don't like the thought of taking him away. More than that, there's no saying when we may come home again; and it would never do to take him away for an indefinite time. The cottage is not what it was. It only holds two little people less than it ever did, Pet, and her poor unfortunate maid Tattycoram; but it seems empty now. Once out of it, there's no knowing when we may come back to it. No, Arthur, I'll be pulled through by Mother.'

They would do best by themselves perhaps, after all, Clennam thought; therefore did not press his proposal.

'If you would come down and stay here for a change, when it wouldn't trouble you,' Mr Meagles resumed, 'I should be glad to think - and so would Mother too, I know - that you were brightening up the old place with a bit of life it was used to when it was full, and that the Babies on the wall there had a kind eye upon them sometimes. You so belong to the spot, and to them, Arthur, and we should every one of us have been so happy if it had fallen out - but, let us see - how's the weather for travelling now?' Mr Meagles broke off, cleared his throat, and got up to look out of the window.

They agreed that the weather was of high promise; and Clennam kept the talk in that safe direction until it had become easy again, when he gently diverted it to Henry Gowan and his quick sense and agreeable qualities when he was delicately dealt With; he likewise dwelt on the indisputable affection he entertained for his wife. Clennam did not fail of his effect upon good Mr Meagles, whom these commendations greatly cheered; and who took Mother to witness that the single and cordial desire of his heart in reference to their daughter's husband, was harmoniously to exchange friendship for friendship, and confidence for confidence. Within a few hours the cottage furniture began to be wrapped up for preservation in the family absence - or, as Mr Meagles expressed it, the house began to put its hair in papers - and within a few days Father and Mother were gone, Mrs Tickit and Dr Buchan were posted, as of yore, behind the parlour blind, and Arthur's solitary feet were rustling among the dry fallen leaves in the garden walks.

As he had a liking for the spot, he seldom let a week pass without paying a visit. Sometimes, he went down alone from Saturday to Monday; sometimes his partner accompanied him; sometimes, he merely strolled for an hour or two about the house and garden, saw that all was right, and returned to London again. At all times, and under all circumstances, Mrs Tickit, with her dark row of curls, and Dr Buchan, sat in the parlour window, looking out for the family return.

On one of his visits Mrs Tickit received him with the words, 'I have something to tell you, Mr Clennam, that will surprise you.' So surprising was the something in question, that it actually brought Mrs Tickit out of the parlour window and produced her in the garden walk, when Clennam went in at the gate on its being opened for him.

'What is it, Mrs Tickit?' said he.

'Sir,' returned that faithful housekeeper, having taken him into the parlour and closed the door; 'if ever I saw the led away and deluded child in my life, I saw her identically in the dusk of yesterday evening.'

'You don't mean Tatty - '

'Coram yes I do!' quoth Mrs Tickit, clearing the disclosure at a leap.

'Where?'

'Mr Clennam,' returned Mrs Tickit, 'I was a little heavy in my eyes, being that I was waiting longer than customary for my cup of tea which was then preparing by Mary Jane. I was not sleeping, nor what

a person would term correctly, dozing. I was more what a person would strictly call watching with my eyes closed.'

Without entering upon an inquiry into this curious abnormal condition, Clennam said, 'Exactly. Well?'

'Well, sir,' proceeded Mrs Tickit, 'I was thinking of one thing and thinking of another. just as you yourself might. just as anybody might.' 'Precisely so,' said Clennam. 'Well?'

'And when I do think of one thing and do think of another,' pursued Mrs Tickit, 'I hardly need to tell you, Mr Clennam, that I think of the family. Because, dear me! a person's thoughts,' Mrs Tickit said this with an argumentative and philosophic air, 'however they may stray, will go more or less on what is uppermost in their minds. They will do it, sir, and a person can't prevent them.'

Arthur subscribed to this discovery with a nod.

'You find it so yourself, sir, I'll be bold to say,' said Mrs Tickit, 'and we all find it so. It an't our stations in life that changes us, Mr Clennam; thoughts is free! - As I was saying, I was thinking of one thing and thinking of another, and thinking very much of the family. Not of the family in the present times only, but in the past times too. For when a person does begin thinking of one thing and thinking of another in that manner, as it's getting dark, what I say is, that all times seem to be present, and a person must get out of that state and consider before they can say which is which.'

He nodded again; afraid to utter a word, lest it should present any new opening to Mrs Tickit's conversational powers.

'In consequence of which,' said Mrs Tickit, 'when I quivered my eyes and saw her actual form and figure looking in at the gate, I let them close again without so much as starting, for that actual form and figure came so pat to the time when it belonged to the house as much as mine or your own, that I never thought at the moment of its having gone away. But, sir, when I quivered my eyes again, and saw that it wasn't there, then it all flooded upon me with a fright, and I jumped up.'

'You ran out directly?' said Clennam.

'I ran out,' assented Mrs Tickit, 'as fast as ever my feet would carry me; and if you'll credit it, Mr Clennam, there wasn't in the whole shining Heavens, no not so much as a finger of that young woman.'

Passing over the absence from the firmament of this novel constellation, Arthur inquired of Mrs Tickit if she herself went beyond the gate?

'Went to and fro, and high and low,' said Mrs Tickit, 'and saw no sign of her!'

He then asked Mrs Tickit how long a space of time she supposed there might have been between the two sets of ocular quiverings she had experienced? Mrs Tickit, though minutely circumstantial in her reply, had no settled opinion between five seconds and ten minutes.

She was so plainly at sea on this part of the case, and had so clearly been startled out of slumber, that Clennam was much disposed to regard the appearance as a dream. Without hurting Mrs Tickit's feelings with that infidel solution of her mystery, he took it away from the cottage with him; and probably would have retained it ever afterwards if a circumstance had not soon happened to change his opinion. He was passing at nightfall along the Strand, and the lamp-lighter was going on before him, under whose hand the street-lamps, blurred by the foggy air, burst out one after another, like so many blazing sunflowers coming into full-blow all at once, - when a stoppage on the pavement, caused by a train of coal-waggons toiling up from the wharves at the river-side, brought him to a stand-still. He had been walking quickly, and going with some current of thought, and the sudden check given to both operations caused him to look freshly about him, as people under such circumstances usually do.

Immediately, he saw in advance - a few people intervening, but still so near to him that he could have touched them by stretching out his arm - Tattycoram and a strange man of a remarkable appearance: a swaggering man, with a high nose, and a black moustache as false in its colour as his eyes were false in their expression, who wore his heavy cloak with the air of a foreigner. His dress and general appearance were those of a man on travel, and he seemed to have very recently joined the girl. In bending down (being much taller than she was), listening to whatever she said to him, he looked over his shoulder with the suspicious glance of one who was not unused to be mistrustful that his footsteps might be dogged. It was then that Clennam saw his face; as his eyes lowered on the people behind him in the aggregate, without particularly resting upon Clennam's face or any other.

He had scarcely turned his head about again, and it was still bent down, listening to the girl, when the stoppage ceased, and the obstructed stream of people flowed on. Still bending his head and listening to the girl, he went on at her side, and Clennam followed

them, resolved to play this unexpected play out, and see where they went.

He had hardly made the determination (though he was not long about it), when he was again as suddenly brought up as he had been by the stoppage. They turned short into the Adelphi, - the girl evidently leading, - and went straight on, as if they were going to the Terrace which overhangs the river.

There is always, to this day, a sudden pause in that place to the roar of the great thoroughfare. The many sounds become so deadened that the change is like putting cotton in the ears, or having the head thickly muffled. At that time the contrast was far greater; there being no small steam-boats on the river, no landing places but slippery wooden stairs and foot-causeways, no railroad on the opposite bank, no hanging bridge or fish-market near at hand, no traffic on the nearest bridge of stone, nothing moving on the stream but watermen's wherries and coal-lighters. Long and broad black tiers of the latter, moored fast in the mud as if they were never to move again, made the shore funereal and silent after dark; and kept what little water-movement there was, far out towards mid- stream. At any hour later than sunset, and not least at that hour when most of the people who have anything to eat at home are going home to eat it, and when most of those who have nothing have hardly yet slunk out to beg or steal, it was a deserted place and looked on a deserted scene.

Such was the hour when Clennam stopped at the corner, observing the girl and the strange man as they went down the street. The man's footsteps were so noisy on the echoing stones that he was unwilling to add the sound of his own. But when they had passed the turning and were in the darkness of the dark corner leading to the terrace, he made after them with such indifferent appearance of being a casual passenger on his way, as he could assume.

When he rounded the dark corner, they were walking along the terrace towards a figure which was coming towards them. If he had seen it by itself, under such conditions of gas-lamp, mist, and distance, he might not have known it at first sight, but with the figure of the girl to prompt him, he at once recognised Miss Wade.

He stopped at the corner, seeming to look back expectantly up the street as if he had made an appointment with some one to meet him there; but he kept a careful eye on the three. When they came together, the man took off his hat, and made Miss Wade a bow. The girl appeared to say a few words as though she presented him, or accounted for his being late, or early, or what not; and then fell a pace or so behind, by herself. Miss Wade and the man then began to walk up and down; the man having the appearance of being extremely

courteous and complimentary in manner; Miss Wade having the appearance of being extremely haughty.

When they came down to the corner and turned, she was saying,

'If I pinch myself for it, sir, that is my business. Confine yourself to yours, and ask me no question.'

'By Heaven, ma'am!' he replied, making her another bow. 'It was my profound respect for the strength of your character, and my admiration of your beauty.'

'I want neither the one nor the other from any one,' said she, 'and certainly not from you of all creatures. Go on with your report.'

'Am I pardoned?' he asked, with an air of half abashed gallantry.

'You are paid,' she said, 'and that is all you want.'

Whether the girl hung behind because she was not to hear the business, or as already knowing enough about it, Clennam could not determine. They turned and she turned. She looked away at the river, as she walked with her hands folded before her; and that was all he could make of her without showing his face. There happened, by good fortune, to be a lounger really waiting for some one; and he sometimes looked over the railing at the water, and sometimes came to the dark corner and looked up the street, rendering Arthur less conspicuous.

When Miss Wade and the man came back again, she was saying, 'You must wait until to-morrow.'

'A thousand pardons?' he returned. 'My faith! Then it's not convenient to-night?'

'No. I tell you I must get it before I can give it to you.'

She stopped in the roadway, as if to put an end to the conference. He of course stopped too. And the girl stopped.

'It's a little inconvenient,' said the man. 'A little. But, Holy Blue! that's nothing in such a service. I am without money to- night, by chance. I have a good banker in this city, but I would not wish to draw upon the house until the time when I shall draw for a round sum.'

'Harriet,' said Miss Wade, 'arrange with him - this gentleman here - for sending him some money to-morrow.' She said it with a slur of the word gentleman which was more contemptuous than any emphasis, and walked slowly on. The man bent his head again, and the girl

spoke to him as they both followed her. Clennam ventured to look at the girl as they Moved away. He could note that her rich black eyes were fastened upon the man with a scrutinising expression, and that she kept at a little distance from him, as they walked side by side to the further end of the terrace.

A loud and altered clank upon the pavement warned him, before he could discern what was passing there, that the man was coming back alone. Clennam lounged into the road, towards the railing; and the man passed at a quick swing, with the end of his cloak thrown over his shoulder, singing a scrap of a French song.

The whole vista had no one in it now but himself. The lounger had lounged out of view, and Miss Wade and Tattycoram were gone. More than ever bent on seeing what became of them, and on having some information to give his good friend, Mr Meagles, he went out at the further end of the terrace, looking cautiously about him. He rightly judged that, at first at all events, they would go in a contrary direction from their late companion. He soon saw them in a neighbouring bye-street, which was not a thoroughfare, evidently allowing time for the man to get well out of their way. They walked leisurely arm-in-arm down one side of the street, and returned on the opposite side. When they came back to the street- corner, they changed their pace for the pace of people with an object and a distance before them, and walked steadily away. Clennam, no less steadily, kept them in sight.

They crossed the Strand, and passed through Covent Garden (under the windows of his old lodging where dear Little Dorrit had come that night), and slanted away north-east, until they passed the great building whence Tattycoram derived her name, and turned into the Gray's Inn Road. Clennam was quite at home here, in right of Flora, not to mention the Patriarch and Pancks, and kept them in view with ease. He was beginning to wonder where they might be going next, when that wonder was lost in the greater wonder with which he saw them turn into the Patriarchal street. That wonder was in its turn swallowed up on the greater wonder with which he saw them stop at the Patriarchal door. A low double knock at the bright brass knocker, a gleam of light into the road from the opened door, a brief pause for inquiry and answer and the door was shut, and they were housed.

After looking at the surrounding objects for assurance that he was not in an odd dream, and after pacing a little while before the house, Arthur knocked at the door. It was opened by the usual maid-servant, and she showed him up at once, with her usual alacrity, to Flora's sitting-room.

There was no one with Flora but Mr F.'s Aunt, which respectable gentlewoman, basking in a balmy atmosphere of tea and toast, was

ensconced in an easy-chair by the fireside, with a little table at her elbow, and a clean white handkerchief spread over her lap on which two pieces of toast at that moment awaited consumption. Bending over a steaming vessel of tea, and looking through the steam, and breathing forth the steam, like a malignant Chinese enchantress engaged in the performance of unholy rites, Mr F.'s Aunt put down her great teacup and exclaimed, 'Drat him, if he an't come back again!'

It would seem from the foregoing exclamation that this uncompromising relative of the lamented Mr F., measuring time by the acuteness of her sensations and not by the clock, supposed Clennam to have lately gone away; whereas at least a quarter of a year had elapsed since he had had the temerity to present himself before her.

'My goodness Arthur!' cried Flora, rising to give him a cordial reception, 'Doyce and Clennam what a start and a surprise for though not far from the machinery and foundry business and surely might be taken sometimes if at no other time about mid-day when a glass of sherry and a humble sandwich of whatever cold meat in the larder might not come amiss nor taste the worse for being friendly for you know you buy it somewhere and wherever bought a profit must be made or they would never keep the place it stands to reason without a motive still never seen and learnt now not to be expected, for as Mr F. himself said if seeing is believing not seeing is believing too and when you don't see you may fully believe you're not remembered not that I expect you Arthur Doyce and Clennam to remember me why should I for the days are gone but bring another teacup here directly and tell her fresh toast and pray sit near the fire.'

Arthur was in the greatest anxiety to explain the object of his visit; but was put off for the moment, in spite of himself, by what he understood of the reproachful purport of these words, and by the genuine pleasure she testified in seeing him. 'And now pray tell me something all you know,' said Flora, drawing her chair near to his, 'about the good dear quiet little thing and all the changes of her fortunes carriage people now no doubt and horses without number most romantic, a coat of arms of course and wild beasts on their hind legs showing it as if it was a copy they had done with mouths from ear to ear good gracious, and has she her health which is the first consideration after all for what is wealth without it Mr F. himself so often saying when his twinges came that sixpence a day and find yourself and no gout so much preferable, not that he could have lived on anything like it being the last man or that the previous little thing though far too familiar an expression now had any tendency of that sort much too slight and small but looked so fragile bless her?'

Mr F.'s Aunt, who had eaten a piece of toast down to the crust, here solemnly handed the crust to Flora, who ate it for her as a matter of business. Mr F.'s Aunt then moistened her ten fingers in slow succession at her lips, and wiped them in exactly the same order on the white handkerchief; then took the other piece of toast, and fell to work upon it. While pursuing this routine, she looked at Clennam with an expression of such intense severity that he felt obliged to look at her in return, against his personal inclinations.

'She is in Italy, with all her family, Flora,' he said, when the dreaded lady was occupied again.

'In Italy is she really?' said Flora, 'with the grapes growing everywhere and lava necklaces and bracelets too that land of poetry with burning mountains picturesque beyond belief though if the organ-boys come away from the neighbourhood not to be scorched nobody can wonder being so young and bringing their white mice with them most humane, and is she really in that favoured land with nothing but blue about her and dying gladiators and Belvederes though Mr F. himself did not believe for his objection when in spirits was that the images could not be true there being no medium between expensive quantities of linen badly got up and all in creases and none whatever, which certainly does not seem probable though perhaps in consequence of the extremes of rich and poor which may account for it.'

Arthur tried to edge a word in, but Flora hurried on again.

'Venice Preserved too,' said she, 'I think you have been there is it well or ill preserved for people differ so and Maccaroni if they really eat it like the conjurors why not cut it shorter, you are acquainted Arthur - dear Doyce and Clennam at least not dear and most assuredly not Doyce for I have not the pleasure but pray excuse me - acquainted I believe with Mantua what has it got to do with Mantua-making for I never have been able to conceive?'

'I believe there is no connection, Flora, between the two,' Arthur was beginning, when she caught him up again.

'Upon your word no isn't there I never did but that's like me I run away with an idea and having none to spare I keep it, alas there was a time dear Arthur that is to say decidedly not dear nor Arthur neither but you understand me when one bright idea gilded the what's-his-name horizon of et cetera but it is darkly clouded now and all is over.'

Arthur's increasing wish to speak of something very different was by this time so plainly written on his face, that Flora stopped in a tender look, and asked him what it was?

'I have the greatest desire, Flora, to speak to some one who is now in this house - with Mr Casby no doubt. Some one whom I saw come in, and who, in a misguided and deplorable way, has deserted the house of a friend of mine.'

'Papa sees so many and such odd people,' said Flora, rising, 'that I shouldn't venture to go down for any one but you Arthur but for you I would willingly go down in a diving-bell much more a dining- room and will come back directly if you'll mind and at the same time not mind Mr F.'s Aunt while I'm gone.'

With those words and a parting glance, Flora bustled out, leaving Clennam under dreadful apprehension of this terrible charge.

The first variation which manifested itself in Mr F.'s Aunt's demeanour when she had finished her piece of toast, was a loud and prolonged sniff. Finding it impossible to avoid construing this demonstration into a defiance of himself, its gloomy significance being unmistakable, Clennam looked plaintively at the excellent though prejudiced lady from whom it emanated, in the hope that she might be disarmed by a meek submission.

'None of your eyes at me,' said Mr F.'s Aunt, shivering with hostility. 'Take that.'

'That' was the crust of the piece of toast. Clennam accepted the boon with a look of gratitude, and held it in his hand under the pressure of a little embarrassment, which was not relieved when Mr F.'s Aunt, elevating her voice into a cry of considerable power, exclaimed, 'He has a proud stomach, this chap! He's too proud a chap to eat it!' and, coming out of her chair, shook her venerable fist so very close to his nose as to tickle the surface. But for the timely return of Flora, to find him in this difficult situation, further consequences might have ensued. Flora, without the least discomposure or surprise, but congratulating the old lady in an approving manner on being 'very lively to-night', handed her back to her chair.

'He has a proud stomach, this chap,' said Mr F.'s relation, on being reseated. 'Give him a meal of chaff!'

'Oh! I don't think he would like that, aunt,' returned Flora.

'Give him a meal of chaff, I tell you,' said Mr F.'s Aunt, glaring round Flora on her enemy. 'It's the only thing for a proud stomach. Let him eat up every morsel. Drat him, give him a meal of chaff!'

Under a general pretence of helping him to this refreshment, Flora got him out on the staircase; Mr F.'s Aunt even then constantly

reiterating, with inexpressible bitterness, that he was 'a chap,' and had a 'proud stomach,' and over and over again insisting on that equine provision being made for him which she had already so strongly prescribed.

'Such an inconvenient staircase and so many corner-stairs Arthur,' whispered Flora, 'would you object to putting your arm round me under my pelerine?'

With a sense of going down-stairs in a highly-ridiculous manner, Clennam descended in the required attitude, and only released his fair burden at the dining-room door; indeed, even there she was rather difficult to be got rid of, remaining in his embrace to murmur, 'Arthur, for mercy's sake, don't breathe it to papa!'

She accompanied Arthur into the room, where the Patriarch sat alone, with his list shoes on the fender, twirling his thumbs as if he had never left off. The youthful Patriarch, aged ten, looked out of his picture-frame above him with no calmer air than he. Both smooth heads were alike beaming, blundering, and bumpy.

'Mr Clennam, I am glad to see you. I hope you are well, sir, I hope you are well. Please to sit down, please to sit down.'

'I had hoped, sir,' said Clennam, doing so, and looking round with a face of blank disappointment, 'not to find you alone.'

'Ah, indeed?' said the Patriarch, sweetly. 'Ah, indeed?'

'I told you so you know papa,' cried Flora.

'Ah, to be sure!' returned the Patriarch. 'Yes, just so. Ah, to be sure!'

'Pray, sir,'demanded Clennam, anxiously, 'is Miss Wade gone?'

'Miss - ? Oh, you call her Wade,' returned Mr Casby. 'Highly proper.' Arthur quickly returned, 'What do you call her?'

'Wade,' said Mr Casby. 'Oh, always Wade.'

After looking at the philanthropic visage and the long silky white hair for a few seconds, during which Mr Casby twirled his thumbs, and smiled at the fire as if he were benevolently wishing it to burn him that he might forgive it, Arthur began:

'I beg your pardon, Mr Casby - '

'Not so, not so,' said the Patriarch, 'not so.'

' - But, Miss Wade had an attendant with her - a young woman brought up by friends of mine, over whom her influence is not considered very salutary, and to whom I should be glad to have the opportunity of giving the assurance that she has not yet forfeited the interest of those protectors.'

'Really, really?' returned the Patriarch.

'Will you therefore be so good as to give me the address of Miss Wade?'

'Dear, dear, dear!' said the Patriarch, 'how very unfortunate! If you had only sent in to me when they were here! I observed the young woman, Mr Clennam. A fine full-coloured young woman, Mr Clennam, with very dark hair and very dark eyes. If I mistake not, if I mistake not?'

Arthur assented, and said once more with new expression, 'If you would be so good as to give me the address.'

'Dear, dear, dear!' exclaimed the Patriarch in sweet regret. 'Tut, tut, tut! what a pity, what a pity! I have no address, sir. Miss Wade mostly lives abroad, Mr Clennam. She has done so for some years, and she is (if I may say so of a fellow-creature and a lady) fitful and uncertain to a fault, Mr Clennam. I may not see her again for a long, long time. I may never see her again. What a pity, what a pity!'

Clennam saw now, that he had as much hope of getting assistance out of the Portrait as out of the Patriarch; but he said nevertheless:

'Mr Casby, could you, for the satisfaction of the friends I have mentioned, and under any obligation of secrecy that you may consider it your duty to impose, give me any information at all touching Miss Wade? I have seen her abroad, and I have seen her at home, but I know nothing of her. Could you give me any account of her whatever?'

'None,' returned the Patriarch, shaking his big head with his utmost benevolence. 'None at all. Dear, dear, dear! What a real pity that she stayed so short a time, and you delayed! As confidential agency business, agency business, I have occasionally paid this lady money; but what satisfaction is it to you, sir, to know that?'

'Truly, none at all,' said Clennam.

'Truly,' assented the Patriarch, with a shining face as he philanthropically smiled at the fire, 'none at all, sir. You hit the wise answer, Mr Clennam. Truly, none at all, sir.' His turning of his smooth thumbs over one another as he sat there, was so typical to Clennam of the way in which he would make the subject revolve if it were

pursued, never showing any new part of it nor allowing it to make the smallest advance, that it did much to help to convince him of his labour having been in vain. He might have taken any time to think about it, for Mr Casby, well accustomed to get on anywhere by leaving everything to his bumps and his white hair, knew his strength to lie in silence. So there Casby sat, twirling and twirling, and making his polished head and forehead look largely benevolent in every knob.

With this spectacle before him, Arthur had risen to go, when from the inner Dock where the good ship Pancks was hove down when out in no cruising ground, the noise was heard of that steamer labouring towards him. It struck Arthur that the noise began demonstratively far off, as though Mr Pancks sought to impress on any one who might happen to think about it, that he was working on from out of hearing. Mr Pancks and he shook hands, and the former brought his employer a letter or two to sign. Mr Pancks in shaking hands merely scratched his eyebrow with his left forefinger and snorted once, but Clennam, who understood him better now than of old, comprehended that he had almost done for the evening and wished to say a word to him outside. Therefore, when he had taken his leave of Mr Casby, and (which was a more difficult process) of Flora, he sauntered in the neighbourhood on Mr Pancks's line of road.

He had waited but a short time when Mr Pancks appeared. Mr Pancks shaking hands again with another expressive snort, and taking off his hat to put his hair up, Arthur thought he received his cue to speak to him as one who knew pretty well what had just now passed. Therefore he said, without any preface:

'I suppose they were really gone, Pancks?'

'Yes,' replied Pancks. 'They were really gone.'

'Does he know where to find that lady?'

'Can't say. I should think so.'

Mr Pancks did not? No, Mr Pancks did not. Did Mr Pancks know anything about her? 'I expect,' rejoined that worthy, 'I know as much about her as she knows about herself. She is somebody's child - anybody's - nobody's.

Put her in a room in London here with any six people old enough to be her parents, and her parents may be there for anything she knows. They may be in any house she sees, they may be in any churchyard she passes, she may run against 'em in any street, she may make chance acquaintance of 'em at any time; and never know it.

She knows nothing about 'em. She knows nothing about any relative whatever. Never did. Never will.' 'Mr Casby could enlighten her, perhaps?'

'May be,' said Pancks. 'I expect so, but don't know. He has long had money (not overmuch as I make out) in trust to dole out to her when she can't do without it. Sometimes she's proud and won't touch it for a length of time; sometimes she's so poor that she must have it. She writhes under her life. A woman more angry, passionate, reckless, and revengeful never lived. She came for money to-night. Said she had peculiar occasion for it.'

'I think,' observed Clennam musing, 'I by chance know what occasion - I mean into whose pocket the money is to go.'

'Indeed?' said Pancks. 'If it's a compact, I recommend that party to be exact in it. I wouldn't trust myself to that woman, young and handsome as she is, if I had wronged her; no, not for twice my proprietor's money! Unless,' Pancks added as a saving clause, 'I had a lingering illness on me, and wanted to get it over.'

Arthur, hurriedly reviewing his own observation of her, found it to tally pretty nearly with Mr Pancks's view.

'The wonder is to me,' pursued Pancks, 'that she has never done for my proprietor, as the only person connected with her story she can lay hold of. Mentioning that, I may tell you, between ourselves, that I am sometimes tempted to do for him myself.'

Arthur started and said, 'Dear me, Pancks, don't say that!'

'Understand me,' said Pancks, extending five cropped coaly finger-nails on Arthur's arm; 'I don't mean, cut his throat. But by all that's precious, if he goes too far, I'll cut his hair!'

Having exhibited himself in the new light of enunciating this tremendous threat, Mr Pancks, with a countenance of grave import, snorted several times and steamed away.