Chapter LV - The Storming Of The Castle In The Air

The sun had gone down full four hours, and it was later than most travellers would like it to be for finding themselves outside the walls of Rome, when Mr Dorrit's carriage, still on its last wearisome stage, rattled over the solitary Campagna. The savage herdsmen and the fierce-looking peasants who had chequered the way while the light lasted, had all gone down with the sun, and left the wilderness blank. At some turns of the road, a pale flare on the horizon, like an exhalation from the ruin-sown land, showed that the city was yet far off; but this poor relief was rare and short-lived. The carriage dipped down again into a hollow of the black dry sea, and for a long time there was nothing visible save its petrified swell and the gloomy sky.

Mr Dorrit, though he had his castle-building to engage his mind, could not be quite easy in that desolate place. He was far more curious, in every swerve of the carriage, and every cry of the postilions, than he had been since he quitted London. The valet on the box evidently quaked. The Courier in the rumble was not altogether comfortable in his mind. As often as Mr Dorrit let down the glass and looked back at him (which was very often), he saw him smoking John Chivery out, it is true, but still generally standing up the while and looking about him, like a man who had his suspicions, and kept upon his guard. Then would Mr Dorrit, pulling up the glass again, reflect that those postilions were cut-throat looking fellows, and that he would have done better to have slept at Civita Vecchia, and have started betimes in the morning. But, for all this, he worked at his castle in the intervals.

And now, fragments of ruinous enclosure, yawning window-gap and crazy wall, deserted houses, leaking wells, broken water-tanks, spectral cypress-trees, patches of tangled vine, and the changing of the track to a long, irregular, disordered lane where everything was crumbling away, from the unsightly buildings to the jolting road - now, these objects showed that they were nearing Rome. And now, a sudden twist and stoppage of the carriage inspired Mr Dorrit with the mistrust that the brigand moment was come for twisting him into a ditch and robbing him; until, letting down the glass again and looking out, he perceived himself assailed by nothing worse than a funeral procession, which came mechanically chaunting by, with an indistinct show of dirty vestments, lurid torches, swinging censers, and a great cross borne before a priest. He was an ugly priest by torchlight; of a lowering aspect, with an overhanging brow; and as his eyes met those of Mr Dorrit, looking bareheaded out of the carriage, his lips, moving as they chaunted, seemed to threaten that important traveller; likewise the action of his hand, which was in fact his manner of returning the traveller's salutation, seemed to come in aid of that menace. So thought Mr Dorrit, made fanciful by the weariness of

building and travelling, as the priest drifted past him, and the procession straggled away, taking its dead along with it. Upon their so-different way went Mr Dorrit's company too; and soon, with their coach load of luxuries from the two great capitals of Europe, they were (like the Goths reversed) beating at the gates of Rome.

Mr Dorrit was not expected by his own people that night. He had been; but they had given him up until to-morrow, not doubting that it was later than he would care, in those parts, to be out. Thus, when his equipage stopped at his own gate, no one but the porter appeared to receive him. Was Miss Dorrit from home? he asked. No. She was within. Good, said Mr Dorrit to the assembling servants; let them keep where they were; let them help to unload the carriage; he would find Miss Dorrit for himself. So he went up his grand staircase, slowly, and tired, and looked into various chambers which were empty, until he saw a light in a small ante-room. It was a curtained nook, like a tent, within two other rooms; and it looked warm and bright in colour, as he approached it through the dark avenue they made.

There was a draped doorway, but no door; and as he stopped here, looking in unseen, he felt a pang. Surely not like jealousy? For why like jealousy? There was only his daughter and his brother there: he, with his chair drawn to the hearth, enjoying the warmth of the evening wood fire; she seated at a little table, busied with some embroidery work. Allowing for the great difference in the still-life of the picture, the figures were much the same as of old; his brother being sufficiently like himself to represent himself, for a moment, in the composition. So had he sat many a night, over a coal fire far away; so had she sat, devoted to him. Yet surely there was nothing to be jealous of in the old miserable poverty. Whence, then, the pang in his heart?

'Do you know, uncle, I think you are growing young again?'

Her uncle shook his head and said, 'Since when, my dear; since when?'

'I think,' returned Little Dorrit, plying her needle, 'that you have been growing younger for weeks past. So cheerful, uncle, and so ready, and so interested.'

'My dear child - all you.'

'All me, uncle!'

'Yes, yes. You have done me a world of good. You have been so considerate of me, and so tender with me, and so delicate in trying to

hide your attentions from me, that I - well, well, well! It's treasured up, my darling, treasured up.'

'There is nothing in it but your own fresh fancy, uncle,' said Little Dorrit, cheerfully.

'Well, well, well!' murmured the old man. 'Thank God!'

She paused for an instant in her work to look at him, and her look revived that former pain in her father's breast; in his poor weak breast, so full of contradictions, vacillations, inconsistencies, the little peevish perplexities of this ignorant life, mists which the morning without a night only can clear away.

'I have been freer with you, you see, my dove,' said the old man, 'since we have been alone. I say, alone, for I don't count Mrs General; I don't care for her; she has nothing to do with me. But I know Fanny was impatient of me. And I don't wonder at it, or complain of it, for I am sensible that I must be in the way, though I try to keep out of it as well as I can. I know I am not fit company for our company. My brother William,' said the old man admiringly, 'is fit company for monarchs; but not so your uncle, my dear. Frederick Dorrit is no credit to William Dorrit, and he knows it quite well. Ah! Why, here's your father, Amy! My dear William, welcome back! My beloved brother, I am rejoiced to see you!'

(Turning his head in speaking, he had caught sight of him as he stood in the doorway.)

Little Dorrit with a cry of pleasure put her arms about her father's neck, and kissed him again and again. Her father was a little impatient, and a little querulous. 'I am glad to find you at last, Amy,' he said. 'Ha. Really I am glad to find - hum - any one to receive me at last. I appear to have been - ha - so little expected, that upon my word I began - ha hum - to think it might be right to offer an apology for - ha - taking the liberty of coming back at all.'

'It was so late, my dear William,' said his brother, 'that we had given you up for to-night.'

'I am stronger than you, dear Frederick,' returned his brother with an elaboration of fraternity in which there was severity; 'and I hope I can travel without detriment at - ha - any hour I choose.'

'Surely, surely,' returned the other, with a misgiving that he had given offence. 'Surely, William.'

'Thank you, Amy,' pursued Mr Dorrit, as she helped him to put off his wrappers. 'I can do it without assistance. I - ha - need not trouble you, Amy. Could I have a morsel of bread and a glass of wine, or - hum - would it cause too much inconvenience?'

'Dear father, you shall have supper in a very few minutes.'

'Thank you, my love,' said Mr Dorrit, with a reproachful frost upon him; 'I - ha - am afraid I am causing inconvenience. Hum. Mrs General pretty well?'

'Mrs General complained of a headache, and of being fatigued; and so, when we gave you up, she went to bed, dear.'

Perhaps Mr Dorrit thought that Mrs General had done well in being overcome by the disappointment of his not arriving. At any rate, his face relaxed, and he said with obvious satisfaction, 'Extremely sorry to hear that Mrs General is not well.'

During this short dialogue, his daughter had been observant of him, with something more than her usual interest. It would seem as though he had a changed or worn appearance in her eyes, and he perceived and resented it; for he said with renewed peevishness, when he had divested himself of his travelling-cloak, and had come to the fire: 'Amy, what are you looking at? What do you see in me that causes you to - ha - concentrate your solicitude on me in that - hum - very particular manner?'

'I did not know it, father; I beg your pardon. It gladdens my eyes to see you again; that's all.'

'Don't say that's all, because - ha - that's not all. You - hum - you think,' said Mr Dorrit, with an accusatory emphasis, 'that I am not looking well.' 'I thought you looked a little tired, love.'

'Then you are mistaken,' said Mr Dorrit. 'Ha, I am not tired. Ha, hum. I am very much fresher than I was when I went away.'

He was so inclined to be angry that she said nothing more in her justification, but remained quietly beside him embracing his arm. As he stood thus, with his brother on the other side, he fell into a heavy doze, of not a minute's duration, and awoke with a start.

'Frederick,' he said, turning to his brother: 'I recommend you to go to bed immediately.'

'No, William. I'll wait and see you sup.'

'Frederick,' he retorted, 'I beg you to go to bed. I - ha - make it a personal request that you go to bed. You ought to have been in bed long ago. You are very feeble.'

'Hah!' said the old man, who had no wish but to please him. 'Well, well, well! I dare say I am.'

'My dear Frederick,' returned Mr Dorrit, with an astonishing superiority to his brother's failing powers, 'there can be no doubt of it. It is painful to me to see you so weak. Ha. It distresses me. Hum. I don't find you looking at all well. You are not fit for this sort of thing. You should be more careful, you should be very careful.'

'Shall I go to bed?' asked Frederick.

'Dear Frederick,' said Mr Dorrit, 'do, I adjure you! Good night, brother. I hope you will be stronger to-morrow. I am not at all pleased with your looks. Good night, dear fellow.' After dismissing his brother in this gracious way, he fell into a doze again before the old man was well out of the room: and he would have stumbled forward upon the logs, but for his daughter's restraining hold.

'Your uncle wanders very much, Amy,' he said, when he was thus roused. 'He is less - ha - coherent, and his conversation is more - hum - broken, than I have - ha, hum - ever known. Has he had any illness since I have been gone?' 'No, father.'

'You - ha - see a great change in him, Amy?'

'I have not observed it, dear.'

'Greatly broken,' said Mr Dorrit. 'Greatly broken. My poor, affectionate, failing Frederick! Ha. Even taking into account what he was before, he is - hum - sadly broken!'

His supper, which was brought to him there, and spread upon the little table where he had seen her working, diverted his attention.

She sat at his side as in the days that were gone, for the first time since those days ended. They were alone, and she helped him to his meat and poured out his drink for him, as she had been used to do in the prison. All this happened now, for the first time since their accession to wealth. She was afraid to look at him much, after the offence he had taken; but she noticed two occasions in the course of his meal, when he all of a sudden looked at her, and looked about him, as if the association were so strong that he needed assurance from his sense of sight that they were not in the old prison-room. Both times, he put his hand to his head as if he missed his old black cap -

though it had been ignominiously given away in the Marshalsea, and had never got free to that hour, but still hovered about the yards on the head of his successor.

He took very little supper, but was a long time over it, and often reverted to his brother's declining state. Though he expressed the greatest pity for him, he was almost bitter upon him. He said that poor Frederick - ha hum - drivelled. There was no other word to express it; drivelled. Poor fellow! It was melancholy to reflect what Amy must have undergone from the excessive tediousness of his Society - wandering and babbling on, poor dear estimable creature, wandering and babbling on - if it had not been for the relief she had had in Mrs General. Extremely sorry, he then repeated with his former satisfaction, that that - ha - superior woman was poorly.

Little Dorrit, in her watchful love, would have remembered the lightest thing he said or did that night, though she had had no subsequent reason to recall that night. She always remembered that, when he looked about him under the strong influence of the old association, he tried to keep it out of her mind, and perhaps out of his own too, by immediately expatiating on the great riches and great company that had encompassed him in his absence, and on the lofty position he and his family had to sustain. Nor did she fail to recall that there were two under-currents, side by side, pervading all his discourse and all his manner; one showing her how well he had got on without her, and how independent he was of her; the other, in a fitful and unintelligible way almost complaining of her, as if it had been possible that she had neglected him while he was away.

His telling her of the glorious state that Mr Merdle kept, and of the court that bowed before him, naturally brought him to Mrs Merdle. So naturally indeed, that although there was an unusual want of sequence in the greater part of his remarks, he passed to her at once, and asked how she was.

'She is very well. She is going away next week.'

'Home?' asked Mr Dorrit.

'After a few weeks' stay upon the road.'

'She will be a vast loss here,' said Mr Dorrit. 'A vast - ha - acquisition at home. To Fanny, and to - hum - the rest of the - ha - great world.'

Little Dorrit thought of the competition that was to be entered upon, and assented very softly.

'Mrs Merdle is going to have a great farewell Assembly, dear, and a dinner before it. She has been expressing her anxiety that you should return in time. She has invited both you and me to her dinner.'

'She is - ha - very kind. When is the day?'

'The day after to-morrow.'

'Write round in the morning, and say that I have returned, and shall - hum - be delighted.'

'May I walk with you up the stairs to your room, dear?'

'No!' he answered, looking angrily round; for he was moving away, as if forgetful of leave-taking. 'You may not, Amy. I want no help. I am your father, not your infirm uncle!' He checked himself, as abruptly as he had broken into this reply, and said, 'You have not kissed me, Amy. Good night, my dear! We must marry - ha - we must marry YOU, now.' With that he went, more slowly and more tired, up the staircase to his rooms, and, almost as soon as he got there, dismissed his valet. His next care was to look about him for his Paris purchases, and, after opening their cases and carefully surveying them, to put them away under lock and key. After that, what with dozing and what with castle-building, he lost himself for a long time, so that there was a touch of morning on the eastward rim of the desolate Campagna when he crept to bed.

Mrs General sent up her compliments in good time next day, and hoped he had rested well after this fatiguing journey. He sent down his compliments, and begged to inform Mrs General that he had rested very well indeed, and was in high condition. Nevertheless, he did not come forth from his own rooms until late in the afternoon; and, although he then caused himself to be magnificently arrayed for a drive with Mrs General and his daughter, his appearance was scarcely up to his description of himself. As the family had no visitors that day, its four members dined alone together. He conducted Mrs General to the seat at his right hand with immense ceremony; and Little Dorrit could not but notice as she followed with her uncle, both that he was again elaborately dressed, and that his manner towards Mrs General was very particular. The perfect formation of that accomplished lady's surface rendered it difficult to displace an atom of its genteel glaze, but Little Dorrit thought she descried a slight thaw of triumph in a corner of her frosty eye.

Notwithstanding what may be called in these pages the Pruney and Prismatic nature of the family banquet, Mr Dorrit several times fell asleep while it was in progress. His fits of dozing were as sudden as they had been overnight, and were as short and profound. When the

first of these slumberings seized him, Mrs General looked almost amazed: but, on each recurrence of the symptoms, she told her polite beads, Papa, Potatoes, Poultry, Prunes, and Prism; and, by dint of going through that infallible performance very slowly, appeared to finish her rosary at about the same time as Mr Dorrit started from his sleep.

He was again painfully aware of a somnolent tendency in Frederick (which had no existence out of his own imagination), and after dinner, when Frederick had withdrawn, privately apologised to Mrs General for the poor man. 'The most estimable and affectionate of brothers,' he said, 'but - ha, hum - broken up altogether. Unhappily, declining fast.'

'Mr Frederick, sir,' quoth Mrs General, 'is habitually absent and drooping, but let us hope it is not so bad as that.'

Mr Dorrit, however, was determined not to let him off. 'Fast declining, madam. A wreck. A ruin. Mouldering away before our eyes. Hum. Good Frederick!'

'You left Mrs Sparkler quite well and happy, I trust?' said Mrs General, after heaving a cool sigh for Frederick.

'Surrounded,' replied Mr Dorrit, 'by - ha - all that can charm the taste, and - hum - elevate the mind. Happy, my dear madam, in a - hum - husband.'

Mrs General was a little fluttered; seeming delicately to put the word away with her gloves, as if there were no knowing what it might lead to.

'Fanny,' Mr Dorrit continued. 'Fanny, Mrs General, has high qualities. Ha. Ambition - hum - purpose, consciousness of - ha - position, determination to support that position - ha, hum - grace, beauty, and native nobility.'

'No doubt,' said Mrs General (with a little extra stiffness).

'Combined with these qualities, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'Fanny has - ha - manifested one blemish which has made me - hum - made me uneasy, and - ha - I must add, angry; but which I trust may now be considered at an end, even as to herself, and which is undoubtedly at an end as to - ha - others.'

'To what, Mr Dorrit,' returned Mrs General, with her gloves again somewhat excited, 'can you allude? I am at a loss to - '

'Do not say that, my dear madam,' interrupted Mr Dorrit.

Mrs General's voice, as it died away, pronounced the words, 'at a loss to imagine.'

After which Mr Dorrit was seized with a doze for about a minute, out of which he sprang with spasmodic nimbleness.

'I refer, Mrs General, to that - ha - strong spirit of opposition, or - hum - I might say - ha - jealousy in Fanny, which has occasionally risen against the - ha - sense I entertain of - hum - the claims of - ha - the lady with whom I have now the honour of communing.'

'Mr Dorrit,' returned Mrs General, 'is ever but too obliging, ever but too appreciative. If there have been moments when I have imagined that Miss Dorrit has indeed resented the favourable opinion Mr Dorrit has formed of my services, I have found, in that only too high opinion, my consolation and recompense.'

'Opinion of your services, madam?' said Mr Dorrit.

'Of,' Mrs General repeated, in an elegantly impressive manner, 'my services.'

'Of your services alone, dear madam?' said Mr Dorrit.

'I presume,' retorted Mrs General, in her former impressive manner, 'of my services alone. For, to what else,' said Mrs General, with a slightly interrogative action of her gloves, 'could I impute - '

'To - ha - yourself, Mrs General. Ha, hum. To yourself and your merits,' was Mr Dorrit's rejoinder.

'Mr Dorrit will pardon me,' said Mrs General, 'if I remark that this is not a time or place for the pursuit of the present conversation. Mr Dorrit will excuse me if I remind him that Miss Dorrit is in the adjoining room, and is visible to myself while I utter her name. Mr Dorrit will forgive me if I observe that I am agitated, and that I find there are moments when weaknesses I supposed myself to have subdued, return with redoubled power. Mr Dorrit will allow me to withdraw.'

'Hum. Perhaps we may resume this - ha - interesting conversation,' said Mr Dorrit, 'at another time; unless it should be, what I hope it is not - hum - in any way disagreeable to - ah - Mrs General.' 'Mr Dorrit,' said Mrs General, casting down her eyes as she rose with a bend, 'must ever claim my homage and obedience.'

Mrs General then took herself off in a stately way, and not with that amount of trepidation upon her which might have been expected in a

less remarkable woman. Mr Dorrit, who had conducted his part of the dialogue with a certain majestic and admiring condescension - much as some people may be seen to conduct themselves in Church, and to perform their part in the service - appeared, on the whole, very well satisfied with himself and with Mrs General too. On the return of that lady to tea, she had touched herself up with a little powder and pomatum, and was not without moral enchantment likewise: the latter showing itself in much sweet patronage of manner towards Miss Dorrit, and in an air of as tender interest in Mr Dorrit as was consistent with rigid propriety. At the close of the evening, when she rose to retire, Mr Dorrit took her by the hand as if he were going to lead her out into the Piazza of the people to walk a minuet by moonlight, and with great solemnity conducted her to the room door, where he raised her knuckles to his lips. Having parted from her with what may be conjectured to have been a rather bony kiss of a cosmetic flavour, he gave his daughter his blessing, graciously. And having thus hinted that there was something remarkable in the wind, he again went to bed.

He remained in the seclusion of his own chamber next morning; but, early in the afternoon, sent down his best compliments to Mrs General, by Mr Tinkler, and begged she would accompany Miss Dorrit on an airing without him. His daughter was dressed for Mrs Merdle's dinner before he appeared. He then presented himself in a refulgent condition as to his attire, but looking indefinably shrunken and old. However, as he was plainly determined to be angry with her if she so much as asked him how he was, she only ventured to kiss his cheek, before accompanying him to Mrs Merdle's with an anxious heart.

The distance that they had to go was very short, but he was at his building work again before the carriage had half traversed it. Mrs Merdle received him with great distinction; the bosom was in admirable preservation, and on the best terms with itself; the dinner was very choice; and the company was very select.

It was principally English; saving that it comprised the usual French Count and the usual Italian Marchese - decorative social milestones, always to be found in certain places, and varying very little in appearance. The table was long, and the dinner was long; and Little Dorrit, overshadowed by a large pair of black whiskers and a large white cravat, lost sight of her father altogether, until a servant put a scrap of paper in her hand, with a whispered request from Mrs Merdle that she would read it directly. Mrs Merdle had written on it in pencil, 'Pray come and speak to Mr Dorrit, I doubt if he is well.'

She was hurrying to him, unobserved, when he got up out of his chair, and leaning over the table called to her, supposing her to be still in her place:

'Amy, Amy, my child!'

The action was so unusual, to say nothing of his strange eager appearance and strange eager voice, that it instantaneously caused a profound silence.

' Amy, my dear,' he repeated. 'Will you go and see if Bob is on the lock?'

She was at his side, and touching him, but he still perversely supposed her to be in her seat, and called out, still leaning over the table, 'Amy, Amy. I don't feel quite myself. Ha. I don't know what's the matter with me. I particularly wish to see Bob. Ha. Of all the turnkeys, he's as much my friend as yours. See if Bob is in the lodge, and beg him to come to me.'

All the guests were now in consternation, and everybody rose.

'Dear father, I am not there; I am here, by you.'

'Oh! You are here, Amy! Good. Hum. Good. Ha. Call Bob. If he has been relieved, and is not on the lock, tell Mrs Bangham to go and fetch him.'

She was gently trying to get him away; but he resisted, and would not go.

'I tell you, child,' he said petulantly, 'I can't be got up the narrow stairs without Bob. Ha. Send for Bob. Hum. Send for Bob - best of all the turnkeys - send for Bob!'

He looked confusedly about him, and, becoming conscious of the number of faces by which he was surrounded, addressed them:

'Ladies and gentlemen, the duty - ha - devolves upon me of - hum - welcoming you to the Marshalsea! Welcome to the Marshalsea! The space is - ha - limited - limited - the parade might be wider; but you will find it apparently grow larger after a time - a time, ladies and gentlemen - and the air is, all things considered, very good. It blows over the - ha - Surrey hills. Blows over the Surrey hills. This is the Snuggery. Hum. Supported by a small subscription of the - ha - Collegiate body. In return for which - hot water - general kitchen - and little domestic advantages. Those who are habituated to the - ha - Marshalsea, are pleased to call me its father. I am accustomed to be complimented by strangers as the - ha - Father of the Marshalsea. Certainly, if years of residence may establish a claim to so - ha - honourable a title, I may accept the - hum - conferred distinction. My child, ladies and gentlemen. My daughter. Born here!'

She was not ashamed of it, or ashamed of him. She was pale and frightened; but she had no other care than to soothe him and get him away, for his own dear sake. She was between him and the wondering faces, turned round upon his breast with her own face raised to his. He held her clasped in his left arm, and between whiles her low voice was heard tenderly imploring him to go away with her.

'Born here,' he repeated, shedding tears. 'Bred here. Ladies and gentlemen, my daughter. Child of an unfortunate father, but - ha - always a gentleman. Poor, no doubt, but - hum - proud. Always proud. It has become a - hum - not infrequent custom for my - ha - personal admirers - personal admirers solely - to be pleased to express their desire to acknowledge my semi-official position here, by offering - ha - little tributes, which usually take the form of - ha - voluntary recognitions of my humble endeavours to - hum - to uphold a Tone here - a Tone - I beg it to be understood that I do not consider myself compromised. Ha. Not compromised. Ha. Not a beggar. No; I repudiate the title! At the same time far be it from me to - hum - to put upon the fine feelings by which my partial friends are actuated, the slight of scrupling to admit that those offerings are - hum - highly acceptable. On the contrary, they are most acceptable. In my child's name, if not in my own, I make the admission in the fullest manner, at the same time reserving - ha - shall I say my personal dignity? Ladies and gentlemen, God bless you all!'

By this time, the exceeding mortification undergone by the Bosom had occasioned the withdrawal of the greater part of the company into other rooms. The few who had lingered thus long followed the rest, and Little Dorrit and her father were left to the servants and themselves. Dearest and most precious to her, he would come with her now, would he not? He replied to her fervid entreaties, that he would never be able to get up the narrow stairs without Bob; where was Bob, would nobody fetch Bob? Under pretence of looking for Bob, she got him out against the stream of gay company now pouring in for the evening assembly, and got him into a coach that had just set down its load, and got him home.

The broad stairs of his Roman palace were contracted in his failing sight to the narrow stairs of his London prison; and he would suffer no one but her to touch him, his brother excepted. They got him up to his room without help, and laid him down on his bed. And from that hour his poor maimed spirit, only remembering the place where it had broken its wings, cancelled the dream through which it had since groped, and knew of nothing beyond the Marshalsea. When he heard footsteps in the street, he took them for the old weary tread in the yards. When the hour came for locking up, he supposed all strangers to be excluded for the night. When the time for opening came again, he was so anxious to see Bob, that they were fain to patch up a

narrative how that Bob - many a year dead then, gentle turnkey - had taken cold, but hoped to be out to-morrow, or the next day, or the next at furthest.

He fell away into a weakness so extreme that he could not raise his hand. But he still protected his brother according to his long usage; and would say with some complacency, fifty times a day, when he saw him standing by his bed, 'My good Frederick, sit down. You are very feeble indeed.'

They tried him with Mrs General, but he had not the faintest knowledge of her. Some injurious suspicion lodged itself in his brain, that she wanted to supplant Mrs Bangham, and that she was given to drinking. He charged her with it in no measured terms; and was so urgent with his daughter to go round to the Marshal and entreat him to turn her out, that she was never reproduced after the first failure. Saving that he once asked 'if Tip had gone outside?' the remembrance of his two children not present seemed to have departed from him. But the child who had done so much for him and had been so poorly repaid, was never out of his mind. Not that he spared her, or was fearful of her being spent by watching and fatigue; he was not more troubled on that score than he had usually been. No; he loved her in his old way. They were in the jail again, and she tended him, and he had constant need of her, and could not turn without her; and he even told her, sometimes, that he was content to have undergone a great deal for her sake. As to her, she bent over his bed with her quiet face against his, and would have laid down her own life to restore him.

When he had been sinking in this painless way for two or three days, she observed him to be troubled by the ticking of his watch - a pompous gold watch that made as great a to-do about its going as if nothing else went but itself and Time. She suffered it to run down; but he was still uneasy, and showed that was not what he wanted. At length he roused himself to explain that he wanted money to be raised on this watch. He was quite pleased when she pretended to take it away for the purpose, and afterwards had a relish for his little tastes of wine and jelly, that he had not had before.

He soon made it plain that this was so; for, in another day or two he sent off his sleeve-buttons and finger-rings. He had an amazing satisfaction in entrusting her with these errands, and appeared to consider it equivalent to making the most methodical and provident arrangements. After his trinkets, or such of them as he had been able to see about him, were gone, his clothes engaged his attention; and it is as likely as not that he was kept alive for some days by the satisfaction of sending them, piece by piece, to an imaginary pawnbroker's.

Thus for ten days Little Dorrit bent over his pillow, laying her cheek against his. Sometimes she was so worn out that for a few minutes they would slumber together. Then she would awake; to recollect with fast-flowing silent tears what it was that touched her face, and to see, stealing over the cherished face upon the pillow, a deeper shadow than the shadow of the Marshalsea Wall.

Quietly, quietly, all the lines of the plan of the great Castle melted one after another. Quietly, quietly, the ruled and cross- ruled countenance on which they were traced, became fair and blank.

Quietly, quietly, the reflected marks of the prison bars and of the zig-zag iron on the wall-top, faded away. Quietly, quietly, the face subsided into a far younger likeness of her own than she had ever seen under the grey hair, and sank to rest.

At first her uncle was stark distracted. 'O my brother! O William, William! You to go before me; you to go alone; you to go, and I to remain! You, so far superior, so distinguished, so noble; I, a poor useless creature fit for nothing, and whom no one would have missed!'

It did her, for the time, the good of having him to think of and to succour.

'Uncle, dear uncle, spare yourself, spare me!'

The old man was not deaf to the last words. When he did begin to restrain himself, it was that he might spare her. He had no care for himself; but, with all the remaining power of the honest heart, stunned so long and now awaking to be broken, he honoured and blessed her.

'O God,' he cried, before they left the room, with his wrinkled hands clasped over her. 'Thou seest this daughter of my dear dead brother! All that I have looked upon, with my half-blind and sinful eyes, Thou hast discerned clearly, brightly. Not a hair of her head shall be harmed before Thee. Thou wilt uphold her here to her last hour. And I know Thou wilt reward her hereafter!'

They remained in a dim room near, until it was almost midnight, quiet and sad together. At times his grief would seek relief in a burst like that in which it had found its earliest expression; but, besides that his little strength would soon have been unequal to such strains, he never failed to recall her words, and to reproach himself and calm himself. The only utterance with which he indulged his sorrow, was the frequent exclamation that his brother was gone, alone; that they had been together in the outset of their lives, that they had fallen into misfortune together, that they had kept together through their many

years of poverty, that they had remained together to that day; and that his brother was gone alone, alone!

They parted, heavy and sorrowful. She would not consent to leave him anywhere but in his own room, and she saw him lie down in his clothes upon his bed, and covered him with her own hands. Then she sank upon her own bed, and fell into a deep sleep: the sleep of exhaustion and rest, though not of complete release from a pervading consciousness of affliction. Sleep, good Little Dorrit. Sleep through the night!

It was a moonlight night; but the moon rose late, being long past the full. When it was high in the peaceful firmament, it shone through half-closed lattice blinds into the solemn room where the stumblings and wanderings of a life had so lately ended. Two quiet figures were within the room; two figures, equally still and impassive, equally removed by an untraversable distance from the teeming earth and all that it contains, though soon to lie in it.

One figure reposed upon the bed. The other, kneeling on the floor, drooped over it; the arms easily and peacefully resting on the coverlet; the face bowed down, so that the lips touched the hand over which with its last breath it had bent. The two brothers were before their Father; far beyond the twilight judgment of this world; high above its mists and obscurities.