Chapter LXIII - The Pupil Of The Marshalsea

The day was sunny, and the Marshalsea, with the hot noon striking upon it, was unwontedly quiet. Arthur Clennam dropped into a solitary arm-chair, itself as faded as any debtor in the jail, and yielded himself to his thoughts.

In the unnatural peace of having gone through the dreaded arrest, and got there, - the first change of feeling which the prison most commonly induced, and from which dangerous resting-place so many men had slipped down to the depths of degradation and disgrace by so many ways, - he could think of some passages in his life, almost as if he were removed from them into another state of existence. Taking into account where he was, the interest that had first brought him there when he had been free to keep away, and the gentle presence that was equally inseparable from the walls and bars about him and from the impalpable remembrances of his later life which no walls or bars could imprison, it was not remarkable that everything his memory turned upon should bring him round again to Little Dorrit. Yet it was remarkable to him; not because of the fact itself, but because of the reminder it brought with it, how much the dear little creature had influenced his better resolutions.

None of us clearly know to whom or to what we are indebted in this wise, until some marked stop in the whirling wheel of life brings the right perception with it. It comes with sickness, it comes with sorrow, it comes with the loss of the dearly loved, it is one of the most frequent uses of adversity. It came to Clennam in his adversity, strongly and tenderly. 'When I first gathered myself together,' he thought, 'and set something like purpose before my jaded eyes, whom had I before me, toiling on, for a good object's sake, without encouragement, without notice, against ignoble obstacles that would have turned an army of received heroes and heroines? One weak girl! When I tried to conquer my misplaced love, and to be generous to the man who was more fortunate than I, though he should never know it or repay me with a gracious word, in whom had I watched patience, self-denial, self-subdual, charitable construction, the noblest generosity of the affections? In the same poor girl! If I, a man, with a man's advantages and means and energies, had slighted the whisper in my heart, that if my father had erred, it was my first duty to conceal the fault and to repair it, what youthful figure with tender feet going almost bare on the damp ground, with spare hands ever working, with its slight shape but half protected from the sharp weather, would have stood before me to put me to shame? Little Dorrit's.' So always as he sat alone in the faded chair, thinking. Always, Little Dorrit. Until it seemed to him as if he met the reward of having wandered away from her, and suffered anything to pass between him and his remembrance of her virtues.

His door was opened, and the head of the elder Chivery was put in a very little way, without being turned towards him.

'I am off the Lock, Mr Clennam, and going out. Can I do anything for you?'

'Many thanks. Nothing.'

'You'll excuse me opening the door,' said Mr Chivery; 'but I couldn't make you hear.'

'Did you knock?' 'Half-a-dozen times.'

Rousing himself, Clennam observed that the prison had awakened from its noontide doze, that the inmates were loitering about the shady yard, and that it was late in the afternoon. He had been thinking for hours. 'Your things is come,' said Mr Chivery, 'and my son is going to carry 'em up. I should have sent 'em up but for his wishing to carry 'em himself. Indeed he would have 'em himself, and so I couldn't send 'em up. Mr Clennam, could I say a word to you?'

'Pray come in,' said Arthur; for Mr Chivery's head was still put in at the door a very little way, and Mr Chivery had but one ear upon him, instead of both eyes. This was native delicacy in Mr Chivery - true politeness; though his exterior had very much of a turnkey about it, and not the least of a gentleman.

'Thank you, sir,' said Mr Chivery, without advancing; 'it's no odds me coming in. Mr Clennam, don't you take no notice of my son (if you'll be so good) in case you find him cut up anyways difficult. My son has a 'art, and my son's 'art is in the right place. Me and his mother knows where to find it, and we find it sitiwated correct.'

With this mysterious speech, Mr Chivery took his ear away and shut the door. He might have been gone ten minutes, when his son succeeded him.

'Here's your portmanteau,' he said to Arthur, putting it carefully down.

'It's very kind of you. I am ashamed that you should have the trouble.'

He was gone before it came to that; but soon returned, saying exactly as before, 'Here's your black box:' which he also put down with care.

'I am very sensible of this attention. I hope we may shake hands now, Mr John.'

Young John, however, drew back, turning his right wrist in a socket made of his left thumb and middle-finger and said as he had said at first, 'I don't know as I can. No; I find I can't!' He then stood regarding the prisoner sternly, though with a swelling humour in his eyes that looked like pity.

'Why are you angry with me,' said Clennam, 'and yet so ready to do me these kind services? There must be some mistake between us. If I have done anything to occasion it I am sorry.'

'No mistake, sir,' returned John, turning the wrist backwards and forwards in the socket, for which it was rather tight. 'No mistake, sir, in the feelings with which my eyes behold you at the present moment! If I was at all fairly equal to your weight, Mr Clennam - which I am not; and if you weren't under a cloud - which you are; and if it wasn't against all rules of the Marshalsea - which it is; those feelings are such, that they would stimulate me, more to having it out with you in a Round on the present spot than to anything else I could name.' Arthur looked at him for a moment in some wonder, and some little anger. 'Well, well!' he said. 'A mistake, a mistake!' Turning away, he sat down with a heavy sigh in the faded chair again.

Young John followed him with his eyes, and, after a short pause, cried out, 'I beg your pardon!'

'Freely granted,' said Clennam, waving his hand without raising his sunken head. 'Say no more. I am not worth it.'

'This furniture, sir,' said Young John in a voice of mild and soft explanation, 'belongs to me. I am in the habit of letting it out to parties without furniture, that have the room. It an't much, but it's at your service. Free, I mean. I could not think of letting you have it on any other terms. You're welcome to it for nothing.'

Arthur raised his head again to thank him, and to say he could not accept the favour. John was still turning his wrist, and still contending with himself in his former divided manner.

'What is the matter between us?' said Arthur.

'I decline to name it, sir,' returned Young John, suddenly turning loud and sharp. 'Nothing's the matter.'

Arthur looked at him again, in vain, for an explanation of his behaviour. After a while, Arthur turned away his head again. Young John said, presently afterwards, with the utmost mildness:

'The little round table, sir, that's nigh your elbow, was - you know whose - I needn't mention him - he died a great gentleman. I bought it of an individual that he gave it to, and that lived here after him. But the individual wasn't any ways equal to him. Most individuals would find it hard to come up to his level.'

Arthur drew the little table nearer, rested his arm upon it, and kept it there.

'Perhaps you may not be aware, sir,' said Young John, 'that I intruded upon him when he was over here in London. On the whole he was of opinion that it WAS an intrusion, though he was so good as to ask me to sit down and to inquire after father and all other old friends. Leastways humblest acquaintances. He looked, to me, a good deal changed, and I said so when I came back. I asked him if Miss Amy was well - '

'And she was?'

'I should have thought you would have known without putting the question to such as me,' returned Young John, after appearing to take a large invisible pill. 'Since you do put me the question, I am sorry I can't answer it. But the truth is, he looked upon the inquiry as a liberty, and said, 'What was that to me?' It was then I became quite aware I was intruding: of which I had been fearful before. However, he spoke very handsome afterwards; very handsome.'

They were both silent for several minutes: except that Young John remarked, at about the middle of the pause, 'He both spoke and acted very handsome.'

It was again Young John who broke the silence by inquiring:

'If it's not a liberty, how long may it be your intentions, sir, to go without eating and drinking?'

'I have not felt the want of anything yet,' returned Clennam. 'I have no appetite just now.'

'The more reason why you should take some support, sir,' urged Young John. 'If you find yourself going on sitting here for hours and hours partaking of no refreshment because you have no appetite, why then you should and must partake of refreshment without an appetite. I'm going to have tea in my own apartment. If it's not a liberty, please to come and take a cup. Or I can bring a tray here in two minutes.'

Feeling that Young John would impose that trouble on himself if he refused, and also feeling anxious to show that he bore in mind both the elder Mr Chivery's entreaty, and the younger Mr Chivery's apology, Arthur rose and expressed his willingness to take a cup of tea in Mr john's apartment. Young John locked his door for him as they went out, slided the key into his pocket with great dexterity, and led the way to his own residence.

It was at the top of the house nearest to the gateway. It was the room to which Clennam had hurried on the day when the enriched family had left the prison for ever, and where he had lifted her insensible from the floor. He foresaw where they were going as soon as their feet touched the staircase. The room was so far changed that it was papered now, and had been repainted, and was far more comfortably furnished; but he could recall it just as he had seen it in that single glance, when he raised her from the ground and carried her down to the carriage.

Young John looked hard at him, biting his fingers.

'I see you recollect the room, Mr Clennam?' 'I recollect it well, Heaven bless her!'

Oblivious of the tea, Young John continued to bite his fingers and to look at his visitor, as long as his visitor continued to glance about the room. Finally, he made a start at the teapot, gustily rattled a quantity of tea into it from a canister, and set off for the common kitchen to fill it with hot water.

The room was so eloquent to Clennam in the changed circumstances of his return to the miserable Marshalsea; it spoke to him so mournfully of her, and of his loss of her; that it would have gone hard with him to resist it, even though he had not been alone. Alone, he did not try. He had his hand on the insensible wall as tenderly as if it had been herself that he touched, and pronounced her name in a low voice. He stood at the window, looking over the prison-parapet with its grim spiked border, and breathed a benediction through the summer haze towards the distant land where she was rich and prosperous.

Young John was some time absent, and, when he came back, showed that he had been outside by bringing with him fresh butter in a cabbage leaf, some thin slices of boiled ham in another cabbage leaf, and a little basket of water-cresses and salad herbs. When these were arranged upon the table to his satisfaction, they sat down to tea.

Clennam tried to do honour to the meal, but unavailingly. The ham sickened him, the bread seemed to turn to sand in his mouth. He could force nothing upon himself but a cup of tea.

'Try a little something green,' said Young John, handing him the basket.

He took a sprig or so of water-cress, and tried again; but the bread turned to a heavier sand than before, and the ham (though it was good enough of itself) seemed to blow a faint simoom of ham through the whole Marshalsea.

'Try a little more something green, sir,' said Young John; and again handed the basket.

It was so like handing green meat into the cage of a dull imprisoned bird, and John had so evidently brought the little basket as a handful of fresh relief from the stale hot paving- stones and bricks of the jail, that Clennam said, with a smile, 'It was very kind of you to think of putting this between the wires; but I cannot even get this down to-day.'

As if the difficulty were contagious, Young John soon pushed away his own plate, and fell to folding the cabbage-leaf that had contained the ham. When he had folded it into a number of layers, one over another, so that it was small in the palm of his hand, he began to flatten it between both his hands, and to eye Clennam attentively. 'I wonder,' he at length said, compressing his green packet with some force, 'that if it's not worth your while to take care of yourself for your own sake, it's not worth doing for some one else's.'

'Truly,' returned Arthur, with a sigh and a smile, 'I don't know for whose.'

'Mr Clennam,' said John, warmly, 'I am surprised that a gentleman who is capable of the straightforwardness that you are capable of, should be capable of the mean action of making me such an answer. Mr Clennam, I am surprised that a gentleman who is capable of having a heart of his own, should be capable of the heartlessness of treating mine in that way. I am astonished at it, sir. Really and truly I am astonished!'

Having got upon his feet to emphasise his concluding words, Young John sat down again, and fell to rolling his green packet on his right leg; never taking his eyes off Clennam, but surveying him with a fixed look of indignant reproach.

'I had got over it, sir,' said John. 'I had conquered it, knowing that it must be conquered, and had come to the resolution to think no more about it. I shouldn't have given my mind to it again, I hope, if to this prison you had not been brought, and in an hour unfortunate for me, this day!' (In his agitation Young John adopted his mother's powerful

construction of sentences.) 'When you first came upon me, sir, in the Lodge, this day, more as if a Upas tree had been made a capture of than a private defendant, such mingled streams of feelings broke loose again within me, that everything was for the first few minutes swept away before them, and I was going round and round in a vortex. I got out of it. I struggled, and got out of it. If it was the last word I had to speak, against that vortex with my utmost powers I strove, and out of it I came. I argued that if I had been rude, apologies was due, and those apologies without a question of demeaning, I did make. And now, when I've been so wishful to show that one thought is next to being a holy one with me and goes before all others - now, after all, you dodge me when I ever so gently hint at it, and throw me back upon myself. For, do not, sir,' said Young John, 'do not be so base as to deny that dodge you do, and thrown me back upon myself you have!'

All amazement, Arthur gazed at him like one lost, only saying, 'What is it? What do you mean, John?' But, John, being in that state of mind in which nothing would seem to be more impossible to a certain class of people than the giving of an answer, went ahead blindly.

'I hadn't,' John declared, 'no, I hadn't, and I never had the audaciousness to think, I am sure, that all was anything but lost. I hadn't, no, why should I say I hadn't if I ever had, any hope that it was possible to be so blest, not after the words that passed, not even if barriers insurmountable had not been raised! But is that a reason why I am to have no memory, why I am to have no thoughts, why I am to have no sacred spots, nor anything?'

'What can you mean?' cried Arthur.

'It's all very well to trample on it, sir,' John went on, scouring a very prairie of wild words, 'if a person can make up his mind to be guilty of the action. It's all very well to trample on it, but it's there. It may be that it couldn't be trampled upon if it wasn't there. But that doesn't make it gentlemanly, that doesn't make it honourable, that doesn't justify throwing a person back upon himself after he has struggled and strived out of himself like a butterfly. The world may sneer at a turnkey, but he's a man - when he isn't a woman, which among female criminals he's expected to be.'

Ridiculous as the incoherence of his talk was, there was yet a truthfulness in Young john's simple, sentimental character, and a sense of being wounded in some very tender respect, expressed in his burning face and in the agitation of his voice and manner, which Arthur must have been cruel to disregard. He turned his thoughts back to the starting-point of this unknown injury; and in the meantime Young John, having rolled his green packet pretty round,

cut it carefully into three pieces, and laid it on a plate as if it were some particular delicacy.

'It seems to me just possible,' said Arthur, when he had retraced the conversation to the water-cresses and back again, 'that you have made some reference to Miss Dorrit.'

'It is just possible, sir,' returned John Chivery.

'I don't understand it. I hope I may not be so unlucky as to make you think I mean to offend you again, for I never have meant to offend you yet, when I say I don't understand it.'

'Sir,' said Young John, 'will you have the perfidy to deny that you know and long have known that I felt towards Miss Dorrit, call it not the presumption of love, but adoration and sacrifice ?'

'Indeed, John, I will not have any perfidy if I know it; why you should suspect me of it I am at a loss to think. Did you ever hear from Mrs Chivery, your mother, that I went to see her once?'

'No, sir,' returned John, shortly. 'Never heard of such a thing.'

'But I did. Can you imagine why?'

'No, sir,' returned John, shortly. 'I can't imagine why.'

'I will tell you. I was solicitous to promote Miss Dorrit's happiness; and if I could have supposed that Miss Dorrit returned your affection - '

Poor John Chivery turned crimson to the tips of his ears. 'Miss Dorrit never did, sir. I wish to be honourable and true, so far as in my humble way I can, and I would scorn to pretend for a moment that she ever did, or that she ever led me to believe she did; no, nor even that it was ever to be expected in any cool reason that she would or could. She was far above me in all respects at all times. As likewise,' added John, 'similarly was her gen-teel family.' His chivalrous feeling towards all that belonged to her made him so very respectable, in spite of his small stature and his rather weak legs, and his very weak hair, and his poetical temperament, that a Goliath might have sat in his place demanding less consideration at Arthur's hands.

'You speak, john,' he said, with cordial admiration, 'like a Man.'

'Well, sir,' returned John, brushing his hand across his eyes,

'then I wish you'd do the same.'

He was quick with this unexpected retort, and it again made Arthur regard him with a wondering expression of face.

'Leastways,' said John, stretching his hand across the tea-tray, 'if too strong a remark, withdrawn! But, why not, why not? When I say to you, Mr Clennam, take care of yourself for some one else's sake, why not be open, though a turnkey? Why did I get you the room which I knew you'd like best? Why did I carry up your things?

Not that I found 'em heavy; I don't mention 'em on that accounts; far from it. Why have I cultivated you in the manner I have done since the morning? On the ground of your own merits? No. They're very great, I've no doubt at all; but not on the ground of them. Another's merits have had their weight, and have had far more weight with Me. Then why not speak free?'

'Unaffectedly, John,' said Clennam, 'you are so good a fellow and I have so true a respect for your character, that if I have appeared to be less sensible than I really am of the fact that the kind services you have rendered me to-day are attributable to my having been trusted by Miss Dorrit as her friend - I confess it to be a fault, and I ask your forgiveness.'

'Oh! why not,' John repeated with returning scorn, 'why not speak free!'

'I declare to you,' returned Arthur, 'that I do not understand you.

Look at me. Consider the trouble I have been in. Is it likely that I would wilfully add to my other self-reproaches, that of being ungrateful or treacherous to you. I do not understand you.'

john's incredulous face slowly softened into a face of doubt. He rose, backed into the garret-window of the room, beckoned Arthur to come there, and stood looking at him thoughtfully. 'Mr Clennam, do you mean to say that you don't know?'

'What, John?'

'Lord,' said Young John, appealing with a gasp to the spikes on the wall. 'He says, What!'

Clennam looked at the spikes, and looked at John; and looked at the spikes, and looked at John.

'He says What! And what is more,' exclaimed Young John, surveying him in a doleful maze, 'he appears to mean it! Do you see this window, sir?'

'Of course I see this window.'

'See this room?'

'Why, of course I see this room.'

'That wall opposite, and that yard down below? They have all been witnesses of it, from day to day, from night to night, from week to week, from month to month. For how often have I seen Miss Dorrit here when she has not seen me!'

'Witnesses of what?' said Clennam.

'Of Miss Dorrit's love.'

'For whom?'

'You,' said John. And touched him with the back of his hand upon the breast, and backed to his chair, and sat down on it with a pale face, holding the arms, and shaking his head at him.

If he had dealt Clennam a heavy blow, instead of laying that light touch upon him, its effect could not have been to shake him more. He stood amazed; his eyes looking at John; his lips parted, and seeming now and then to form the word 'Me!' without uttering it; his hands dropped at his sides; his whole appearance that of a man who has been awakened from sleep, and stupefied by intelligence beyond his full comprehension.

'Me!' he at length said aloud.

'Ah!' groaned Young John. 'You!'

He did what he could to muster a smile, and returned, 'Your fancy. You are completely mistaken.'

'I mistaken, sir!' said Young John. '*I* completely mistaken on that subject! No, Mr Clennam, don't tell me so. On any other, if you like, for I don't set up to be a penetrating character, and am well aware of my own deficiencies. But, *I* mistaken on a point that has caused me more smart in my breast than a flight of savages' arrows could have done! *I* mistaken on a point that almost sent me into my grave, as I sometimes wished it would, if the grave could only have been made compatible with the tobacco- business and father and mother's feelings! I mistaken on a point that, even at the present moment, makes me take out my pocket- handkercher like a great girl, as people say: though I am sure I don't know why a great girl should be a term

of reproach, for every rightly constituted male mind loves 'em great and small. Don't tell me so, don't tell me so!'

Still highly respectable at bottom, though absurd enough upon the surface, Young John took out his pocket-handkerchief with a genuine absence both of display and concealment, which is only to be seen in a man with a great deal of good in him, when he takes out his pocket-handkerchief for the purpose of wiping his eyes. Having dried them, and indulged in the harmless luxury of a sob and a sniff, he put it up again.

The touch was still in its influence so like a blow that Arthur could not get many words together to close the subject with. He assured John Chivery when he had returned his handkerchief to his pocket, that he did all honour to his disinterestedness and to the fidelity of his remembrance of Miss Dorrit. As to the impression on his mind, of which he had just relieved it - here John interposed, and said, 'No impression! Certainty!' - as to that, they might perhaps speak of it at another time, but would say no more now. Feeling low-spirited and weary, he would go back to his room, with john's leave, and come out no more that night. John assented, and he crept back in the shadow of the wall to his own lodging.

The feeling of the blow was still so strong upon him that, when the dirty old woman was gone whom he found sitting on the stairs outside his door, waiting to make his bed, and who gave him to understand while doing it, that she had received her instructions from Mr Chivery, 'not the old 'un but the young 'un,' he sat down in the faded arm-chair, pressing his head between his hands, as if he had been stunned. Little Dorrit love him! More bewildering to him than his misery, far.

Consider the improbability. He had been accustomed to call her his child, and his dear child, and to invite her confidence by dwelling upon the difference in their respective ages, and to speak of himself as one who was turning old. Yet she might not have thought him old. Something reminded him that he had not thought himself so, until the roses had floated away upon the river.

He had her two letters among other papers in his box, and he took them out and read them. There seemed to be a sound in them like the sound of her sweet voice. It fell upon his ear with many tones of tenderness, that were not insusceptible of the new meaning. Now it was that the quiet desolation of her answer,'No, No, No,' made to him that night in that very room - that night when he had been shown the dawn of her altered fortune, and when other words had passed between them which he had been destined to remember in humiliation and a prisoner, rushed into his mind.

Consider the improbability.

But it had a preponderating tendency, when considered, to become fainter. There was another and a curious inquiry of his own heart's that concurrently became stronger. In the reluctance he had felt to believe that she loved any one; in his desire to set that question at rest; in a half-formed consciousness he had had that there would be a kind of nobleness in his helping her love for any one, was there no suppressed something on his own side that he had hushed as it arose? Had he ever whispered to himself that he must not think of such a thing as her loving him, that he must not take advantage of her gratitude, that he must keep his experience in remembrance as a warning and reproof; that he must regard such youthful hopes as having passed away, as his friend's dead daughter had passed away; that he must be steady in saying to himself that the time had gone by him, and he was too saddened and old?

He had kissed her when he raised her from the ground on the day when she had been so consistently and expressively forgotten. Quite as he might have kissed her, if she had been conscious? No difference?

The darkness found him occupied with these thoughts. The darkness also found Mr and Mrs Plornish knocking at his door. They brought with them a basket, filled with choice selections from that stock in trade which met with such a quick sale and produced such a slow return. Mrs Plornish was affected to tears. Mr Plornish amiably growled, in his philosophical but not lucid manner, that there was ups you see, and there was downs. It was in vain to ask why ups, why downs; there they was, you know. He had heerd it given for a truth that accordin' as the world went round, which round it did rewolve undoubted, even the best of gentlemen must take his turn of standing with his ed upside down and all his air a flying the wrong way into what you might call Space. Wery well then. What Mr Plornish said was, wery well then. That gentleman's ed would come up-ards when his turn come, that gentleman's air would be a pleasure to look upon being all smooth again, and wery well then!

It has been already stated that Mrs Plornish, not being philosophical, wept. It further happened that Mrs Plornish, not being philosophical, was intelligible. It may have arisen out of her softened state of mind, out of her sex's wit, out of a woman's quick association of ideas, or out of a woman's no association of ideas, but it further happened somehow that Mrs Plornish's intelligibility displayed itself upon the very subject of Arthur's meditations.

'The way father has been talking about you, Mr Clennam,' said Mrs Plornish, 'you hardly would believe. It's made him quite poorly. As to

his voice, this misfortune has took it away. You know what a sweet singer father is; but he couldn't get a note out for the children at tea, if you'll credit what I tell you.'

While speaking, Mrs Plornish shook her head, and wiped her eyes, and looked retrospectively about the room.

'As to Mr Baptist,' pursued Mrs Plornish, 'whatever he'll do when he comes to know of it, I can't conceive nor yet imagine. He'd have been here before now, you may be sure, but that he's away on confidential business of your own. The persevering manner in which he follows up that business, and gives himself no rest from it - it really do,' said Mrs Plornish, winding up in the Italian manner, 'as I say to him, Mooshattonisha padrona.'

Though not conceited, Mrs Plornish felt that she had turned this Tuscan sentence with peculiar elegance. Mr Plornish could not conceal his exultation in her accomplishments as a linguist.

'But what I say is, Mr Clennam,' the good woman went on, 'there's always something to be thankful for, as I am sure you will yourself admit. Speaking in this room, it's not hard to think what the present something is. It's a thing to be thankful for, indeed, that Miss Dorrit is not here to know it.'

Arthur thought she looked at him with particular expression.

'It's a thing,' reiterated Mrs Plornish, 'to be thankful for, indeed, that Miss Dorrit is far away. It's to be hoped she is not likely to hear of it. If she had been here to see it, sir, it's not to be doubted that the sight of you,' Mrs Plornish repeated those words - 'not to be doubted, that the sight of you - in misfortune and trouble, would have been almost too much for her affectionate heart. There's nothing I can think of, that would have touched Miss Dorrit so bad as that.'

Of a certainty Mrs Plornish did look at him now, with a sort of quivering defiance in her friendly emotion.

'Yes!' said she. 'And it shows what notice father takes, though at his time of life, that he says to me this afternoon, which Happy Cottage knows I neither make it up nor any ways enlarge, 'Mary, it's much to be rejoiced in that Miss Dorrit is not on the spot to behold it.' Those were father's words. Father's own words was, 'Much to be rejoiced in, Mary, that Miss Dorrit is not on the spot to behold it.' I says to father then, I says to him, 'Father, you are right!' That,' Mrs Plornish concluded, with the air of a very precise legal witness, 'is what passed betwixt father and me. And I tell you nothing but what did pass betwixt me and father.'

Mr Plornish, as being of a more laconic temperament, embraced this opportunity of interposing with the suggestion that she should now leave Mr Clennam to himself. 'For, you see,' said Mr Plornish, gravely, 'I know what it is, old gal;' repeating that valuable remark several times, as if it appeared to him to include some great moral secret. Finally, the worthy couple went away arm in arm.

Little Dorrit, Little Dorrit. Again, for hours. Always Little Dorrit!

Happily, if it ever had been so, it was over, and better over. Granted that she had loved him, and he had known it and had suffered himself to love her, what a road to have led her away upon - the road that would have brought her back to this miserable place! He ought to be much comforted by the reflection that she was quit of it forever; that she was, or would soon be, married (vague rumours of her father's projects in that direction had reached Bleeding Heart Yard, with the news of her sister's marriage); and that the Marshalsea gate had shut for ever on all those perplexed possibilities of a time that was gone.

Dear Little Dorrit.

Looking back upon his own poor story, she was its vanishing-point. Every thing in its perspective led to her innocent figure. He had travelled thousands of miles towards it; previous unquiet hopes and doubts had worked themselves out before it; it was the centre of the interest of his life; it was the termination of everything that was good and pleasant in it; beyond, there was nothing but mere waste and darkened sky.

As ill at ease as on the first night of his lying down to sleep within those dreary walls, he wore the night out with such thoughts. What time Young John lay wrapt in peaceful slumber, after composing and arranging the following monumental inscription on his pillow -

STRANGER! RESPECT THE TOMB OF JOHN CHIVERY, JUNIOR, WHO DIED AT AN ADVANCED AGE NOT NECESSARY TO MENTION. HE ENCOUNTERED HIS RIVAL IN A DISTRESSED STATE, AND FELT INCLINED TO HAVE A ROUND WITH HIM; BUT, FOR THE SAKE OF THE LOVED ONE, CONQUERED THOSE FEELINGS OF BITTERNESS, AND BECAME MAGNANIMOUS.