

## Chapter LXIX - Going!

The changes of a fevered room are slow and fluctuating; but the changes of the fevered world are rapid and irrevocable.

It was Little Dorrit's lot to wait upon both kinds of change. The Marshalsea walls, during a portion of every day, again embraced her in their shadows as their child, while she thought for Clennam, worked for him, watched him, and only left him, still to devote her utmost love and care to him. Her part in the life outside the gate urged its pressing claims upon her too, and her patience untiringly responded to them. Here was Fanny, proud, fitful, whimsical, further advanced in that disqualified state for going into society which had so much fretted her on the evening of the tortoise-shell knife, resolved always to want comfort, resolved not to be comforted, resolved to be deeply wronged, and resolved that nobody should have the audacity to think her so. Here was her brother, a weak, proud, tipsy, young old man, shaking from head to foot, talking as indistinctly as if some of the money he plumed himself upon had got into his mouth and couldn't be got out, unable to walk alone in any act of his life, and patronising the sister whom he selfishly loved (he always had that negative merit, ill-starred and ill-launched Tip!) because he suffered her to lead him. Here was Mrs Merdle in gauzy mourning - the original cap whereof had possibly been rent to pieces in a fit of grief, but had certainly yielded to a highly becoming article from the Parisian market - warring with Fanny foot to foot, and breasting her with her desolate bosom every hour in the day. Here was poor Mr Sparkler, not knowing how to keep the peace between them, but humbly inclining to the opinion that they could do no better than agree that they were both remarkably fine women, and that there was no nonsense about either of them - for which gentle recommendation they united in falling upon him frightfully. Then, too, here was Mrs General, got home from foreign parts, sending a Prune and a Prism by post every other day, demanding a new Testimonial by way of recommendation to some vacant appointment or other. Of which remarkable gentlewoman it may be finally observed, that there surely never was a gentlewoman of whose transcendent fitness for any vacant appointment on the face of this earth, so many people were (as the warmth of her Testimonials evinced) so perfectly satisfied - or who was so very unfortunate in having a large circle of ardent and distinguished admirers, who never themselves happened to want her in any capacity.

On the first crash of the eminent Mr Merdle's decease, many important persons had been unable to determine whether they should cut Mrs Merdle, or comfort her. As it seemed, however, essential to the strength of their own case that they should admit her to have been cruelly deceived, they graciously made the admission, and continued to know her. It followed that Mrs Merdle, as a woman of fashion and

good breeding who had been sacrificed to the wiles of a vulgar barbarian (for Mr Merdle was found out from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, the moment he was found out in his pocket), must be actively championed by her order for her order's sake. She returned this fealty by causing it to be understood that she was even more incensed against the felonious shade of the deceased than anybody else was; thus, on the whole, she came out of her furnace like a wise woman, and did exceedingly well.

Mr Sparkler's lordship was fortunately one of those shelves on which a gentleman is considered to be put away for life, unless there should be reasons for hoisting him up with the Barnacle crane to a more lucrative height. That patriotic servant accordingly stuck to his colours (the Standard of four Quarterings), and was a perfect Nelson in respect of nailing them to the mast. On the profits of his intrepidity, Mrs Sparkler and Mrs Merdle, inhabiting different floors of the genteel little temple of inconvenience to which the smell of the day before yesterday's soup and coach-horses was as constant as Death to man, arrayed themselves to fight it out in the lists of Society, sworn rivals. And Little Dorrit, seeing all these things as they developed themselves, could not but wonder, anxiously, into what back corner of the genteel establishment Fanny's children would be poked by-and-by, and who would take care of those unborn little victims.

Arthur being far too ill to be spoken with on subjects of emotion or anxiety, and his recovery greatly depending on the repose into which his weakness could be hushed, Little Dorrit's sole reliance during this heavy period was on Mr Meagles. He was still abroad; but she had written to him through his daughter, immediately after first seeing Arthur in the Marshalsea and since, confiding her uneasiness to him on the points on which she was most anxious, but especially on one. To that one, the continued absence of Mr Meagles abroad, instead of his comforting presence in the Marshalsea, was referable.

Without disclosing the precise nature of the documents that had fallen into Rigaud's hands, Little Dorrit had confided the general outline of that story to Mr Meagles, to whom she had also recounted his fate. The old cautious habits of the scales and scoop at once showed Mr Meagles the importance of recovering the original papers; wherefore he wrote back to Little Dorrit, strongly confirming her in the solicitude she expressed on that head, and adding that he would not come over to England 'without making some attempt to trace them out.'

By this time Mr Henry Gowan had made up his mind that it would be agreeable to him not to know the Meagleses. He was so considerate as to lay no injunctions on his wife in that particular; but he mentioned to Mr Meagles that personally they did not appear to him to get on together, and that he thought it would be a good thing if - politely, and

without any scene, or anything of that sort - they agreed that they were the best fellows in the world, but were best apart. Poor Mr Meagles, who was already sensible that he did not advance his daughter's happiness by being constantly slighted in her presence, said 'Good, Henry! You are my Pet's husband; you have displaced me, in the course of nature; if you wish it, good!' This arrangement involved the contingent advantage, which perhaps Henry Gowan had not foreseen, that both Mr and Mrs Meagles were more liberal than before to their daughter, when their communication was only with her and her young child: and that his high spirit found itself better provided with money, without being under the degrading necessity of knowing whence it came.

Mr Meagles, at such a period, naturally seized an occupation with great ardour. He knew from his daughter the various towns which Rigaud had been haunting, and the various hotels at which he had been living for some time back. The occupation he set himself was to visit these with all discretion and speed, and, in the event of finding anywhere that he had left a bill unpaid, and a box or parcel behind, to pay such bill, and bring away such box or parcel.

With no other attendant than Mother, Mr Meagles went upon his pilgrimage, and encountered a number of adventures. Not the least of his difficulties was, that he never knew what was said to him, and that he pursued his inquiries among people who never knew what he said to them. Still, with an unshaken confidence that the English tongue was somehow the mother tongue of the whole world, only the people were too stupid to know it, Mr Meagles harangued innkeepers in the most voluble manner, entered into loud explanations of the most complicated sort, and utterly renounced replies in the native language of the respondents, on the ground that they were 'all bosh.' Sometimes interpreters were called in; whom Mr Meagles addressed in such idiomatic terms of speech, as instantly to extinguish and shut up - which made the matter worse. On a balance of the account, however, it may be doubted whether he lost much; for, although he found no property, he found so many debts and various associations of discredit with the proper name, which was the only word he made intelligible, that he was almost everywhere overwhelmed with injurious accusations. On no fewer than four occasions the police were called in to receive denunciations of Mr Meagles as a Knight of Industry, a good-for-nothing, and a thief, all of which opprobrious language he bore with the best temper (having no idea what it meant), and was in the most ignominious manner escorted to steam-boats and public carriages, to be got rid of, talking all the while, like a cheerful and fluent Briton as he was, with Mother under his arm.

But, in his own tongue, and in his own head, Mr Meagles was a clear, shrewd, persevering man. When he had 'worked round,' as he called

it, to Paris in his pilgrimage, and had wholly failed in it so far, he was not disheartened. 'The nearer to England I follow him, you see, Mother,' argued Mr Meagles, 'the nearer I am likely to come to the papers, whether they turn up or no. Because it is only reasonable to conclude that he would deposit them somewhere where they would be safe from people over in England, and where they would yet be accessible to himself, don't you see?'

At Paris Mr Meagles found a letter from Little Dorrit, lying waiting for him; in which she mentioned that she had been able to talk for a minute or two with Mr Clennam about this man who was no more; and that when she told Mr Clennam that his friend Mr Meagles, who was on his way to see him, had an interest in ascertaining something about the man if he could, he had asked her to tell Mr Meagles that he had been known to Miss Wade, then living in such a street at Calais. 'Oho!' said Mr Meagles.

As soon afterwards as might be in those Diligence days, Mr Meagles rang the cracked bell at the cracked gate, and it jarred open, and the peasant-woman stood in the dark doorway, saying, 'Ice-say! Seer! Who?' In acknowledgment of whose address, Mr Meagles murmured to himself that there was some sense about these Calais people, who really did know something of what you and themselves were up to; and returned, 'Miss Wade, my dear.' He was then shown into the presence of Miss Wade.

'It's some time since we met,' said Mr Meagles, clearing his throat; 'I hope you have been pretty well, Miss Wade?'

Without hoping that he or anybody else had been pretty well, Miss Wade asked him to what she was indebted for the honour of seeing him again? Mr Meagles, in the meanwhile, glanced all round the room without observing anything in the shape of a box.

'Why, the truth is, Miss Wade,' said Mr Meagles, in a comfortable, managing, not to say coaxing voice, 'it is possible that you may be able to throw a light upon a little something that is at present dark. Any unpleasant bygones between us are bygones, I hope. Can't be helped now. You recollect my daughter? Time changes so! A mother!'

In his innocence, Mr Meagles could not have struck a worse key- note. He paused for any expression of interest, but paused in vain.

'That is not the subject you wished to enter on?' she said, after a cold silence.

'No, no,' returned Mr Meagles. 'No. I thought your good nature might -'

'I thought you knew,' she interrupted, with a smile, 'that my good nature is not to be calculated upon?'

'Don't say so,' said Mr Meagles; 'you do yourself an injustice. However, to come to the point.' For he was sensible of having gained nothing by approaching it in a roundabout way. 'I have heard from my friend Clennam, who, you will be sorry to hear, has been and still is very ill -

He paused again, and again she was silent.

' - that you had some knowledge of one Blandois, lately killed in London by a violent accident. Now, don't mistake me! I know it was a slight knowledge,' said Mr Meagles, dexterously forestalling an angry interruption which he saw about to break. 'I am fully aware of that. It was a slight knowledge, I know. But the question is,' Mr Meagles's voice here became comfortable again, 'did he, on his way to England last time, leave a box of papers, or a bundle of papers, or some papers or other in some receptacle or other - any papers - with you: begging you to allow him to leave them here for a short time, until he wanted them?'

'The question is?' she repeated. 'Whose question is?'

'Mine,' said Mr Meagles. 'And not only mine but Clennam's question, and other people's question. Now, I am sure,' continued Mr Meagles, whose heart was overflowing with Pet, 'that you can't have any unkind feeling towards my daughter; it's impossible. Well! It's her question, too; being one in which a particular friend of hers is nearly interested. So here I am, frankly to say that is the question, and to ask, Now, did he?'

'Upon my word,' she returned, 'I seem to be a mark for everybody who knew anything of a man I once in my life hired, and paid, and dismissed, to aim their questions at!'

'Now, don't,' remonstrated Mr Meagles, 'don't! Don't take offence, because it's the plainest question in the world, and might be asked of any one. The documents I refer to were not his own, were wrongfully obtained, might at some time or other be troublesome to an innocent person to have in keeping, and are sought by the people to whom they really belong. He passed through Calais going to London, and there were reasons why he should not take them with him then, why he should wish to be able to put his hand upon them readily, and why he should distrust leaving them with people of his own sort. Did he leave them here? I declare if I knew how to avoid giving you offence, I would take any pains to do it. I put the question personally, but there's

nothing personal in it. I might put it to any one; I have put it already to many people. Did he leave them here? Did he leave anything here?'

'No.'

'Then unfortunately, Miss Wade, you know nothing about them?'

'I know nothing about them. I have now answered your unaccountable question. He did not leave them here, and I know nothing about them.'

'There!' said Mr Meagles rising. 'I am sorry for it; that's over; and I hope there is not much harm done. - Tattycoram well, Miss Wade?'

'Harriet well? O yes!'

'I have put my foot in it again,' said Mr Meagles, thus corrected. 'I can't keep my foot out of it here, it seems. Perhaps, if I had thought twice about it, I might never have given her the jingling name. But, when one means to be good-natured and sportive with young people, one doesn't think twice. Her old friend leaves a kind word for her, Miss Wade, if you should think proper to deliver it.'

She said nothing as to that; and Mr Meagles, taking his honest face out of the dull room, where it shone like a sun, took it to the Hotel where he had left Mrs Meagles, and where he made the Report: 'Beaten, Mother; no effects!' He took it next to the London Steam Packet, which sailed in the night; and next to the Marshalsea.

The faithful John was on duty when Father and Mother Meagles presented themselves at the wicket towards nightfall. Miss Dorrit was not there then, he said; but she had been there in the morning, and invariably came in the evening. Mr Clennam was slowly mending; and Maggy and Mrs Plornish and Mr Baptist took care of him by turns. Miss Dorrit was sure to come back that evening before the bell rang. There was the room the Marshal had lent her, up-stairs, in which they could wait for her, if they pleased. Mistrustful that it might be hazardous to Arthur to see him without preparation, Mr Meagles accepted the offer; and they were left shut up in the room, looking down through its barred window into the jail.

The cramped area of the prison had such an effect on Mrs Meagles that she began to weep, and such an effect on Mr Meagles that he began to gasp for air. He was walking up and down the room, panting, and making himself worse by laboriously fanning himself with her handkerchief, when he turned towards the opening door.

'Eh? Good gracious!' said Mr Meagles, 'this is not Miss Dorrit! Why, Mother, look! Tattycoram!'

No other. And in Tattycoram's arms was an iron box some two feet square. Such a box had Affery Flintwinch seen, in the first of her dreams, going out of the old house in the dead of the night under Double's arm. This, Tattycoram put on the ground at her old master's feet: this, Tattycoram fell on her knees by, and beat her hands upon, crying half in exultation and half in despair, half in laughter and half in tears, 'Pardon, dear Master; take me back, dear Mistress; here it is!'

'Tatty!' exclaimed Mr Meagles.

'What you wanted!' said Tattycoram. 'Here it is! I was put in the next room not to see you. I heard you ask her about it, I heard her say she hadn't got it, I was there when he left it, and I took it at bedtime and brought it away. Here it is!'

'Why, my girl,' cried Mr Meagles, more breathless than before, 'how did you come over?'

'I came in the boat with you. I was sitting wrapped up at the other end. When you took a coach at the wharf, I took another coach and followed you here. She never would have given it up after what you had said to her about its being wanted; she would sooner have sunk it in the sea, or burnt it. But, here it is!'

The glow and rapture that the girl was in, with her 'Here it is!'

'She never wanted it to be left, I must say that for her; but he left it, and I knew well that after what you said, and after her denying it, she never would have given it up. But here it is! Dear Master, dear Mistress, take me back again, and give me back the dear old name! Let this intercede for me. Here it is!'

Father and Mother Meagles never deserved their names better than when they took the headstrong foundling-girl into their protection again.

'Oh! I have been so wretched,' cried Tattycoram, weeping much more, 'always so unhappy, and so repentant! I was afraid of her from the first time I saw her. I knew she had got a power over me through understanding what was bad in me so well. It was a madness in me, and she could raise it whenever she liked. I used to think, when I got into that state, that people were all against me because of my first beginning; and the kinder they were to me, the worse fault I found in them. I made it out that they triumphed above me, and that they wanted to make me envy them, when I know - when I even knew then

- that they never thought of such a thing. And my beautiful young mistress not so happy as she ought to have been, and I gone away from her! Such a brute and a wretch as she must think me! But you'll say a word to her for me, and ask her to be as forgiving as you two are? For I am not so bad as I was,' pleaded Tattycoram; 'I am bad enough, but not so bad as I was, indeed. I have had Miss Wade before me all this time, as if it was my own self grown ripe - turning everything the wrong way, and twisting all good into evil. I have had her before me all this time, finding no pleasure in anything but keeping me as miserable, suspicious, and tormenting as herself. Not that she had much to do, to do that,' cried Tattycoram, in a closing great burst of distress, 'for I was as bad as bad could be. I only mean to say, that, after what I have gone through, I hope I shall never be quite so bad again, and that I shall get better by very slow degrees. I'll try very hard. I won't stop at five-and-twenty, sir, I'll count five-and-twenty hundred, five-and-twenty thousand!'

Another opening of the door, and Tattycoram subsided, and Little Dorrit came in, and Mr Meagles with pride and joy produced the box, and her gentle face was lighted up with grateful happiness and joy.

The secret was safe now! She could keep her own part of it from him; he should never know of her loss; in time to come he should know all that was of import to himself; but he should never know what concerned her only. That was all passed, all forgiven, all forgotten.

'Now, my dear Miss Dorrit,' said Mr Meagles; 'I am a man of business - or at least was - and I am going to take my measures promptly, in that character. Had I better see Arthur to-night?'

'I think not to-night. I will go to his room and ascertain how he is. But I think it will be better not to see him to-night.'

'I am much of your opinion, my dear,' said Mr Meagles, 'and therefore I have not been any nearer to him than this dismal room. Then I shall probably not see him for some little time to come. But I'll explain what I mean when you come back.'

She left the room. Mr Meagles, looking through the bars of the window, saw her pass out of the Lodge below him into the prison-yard. He said gently, 'Tattycoram, come to me a moment, my good girl.'

She went up to the window.

'You see that young lady who was here just now - that little, quiet, fragile figure passing along there, Tatty? Look. The people stand out of the way to let her go by. The men - see the poor, shabby fellows - pull



off their hats to her quite politely, and now she glides in at that doorway. See her, Tattycoram?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I have heard tell, Tatty, that she was once regularly called the child of this place. She was born here, and lived here many years.

I can't breathe here. A doleful place to be born and bred in, Tattycoram?'

'Yes indeed, sir!'

'If she had constantly thought of herself, and settled with herself that everybody visited this place upon her, turned it against her, and cast it at her, she would have led an irritable and probably an useless existence. Yet I have heard tell, Tattycoram, that her young life has been one of active resignation, goodness, and noble service. Shall I tell you what I consider those eyes of hers, that were here just now, to have always looked at, to get that expression?'

'Yes, if you please, sir.'

'Duty, Tattycoram. Begin it early, and do it well; and there is no antecedent to it, in any origin or station, that will tell against us with the Almighty, or with ourselves.'

They remained at the window, Mother joining them and pitying the prisoners, until she was seen coming back. She was soon in the room, and recommended that Arthur, whom she had left calm and composed, should not be visited that night.

'Good!' said Mr Meagles, cheerily. 'I have not a doubt that's best. I shall trust my remembrances then, my sweet nurse, in your hands, and I well know they couldn't be in better. I am off again to-morrow morning.'

Little Dorrit, surprised, asked him where?

'My dear,' said Mr Meagles, 'I can't live without breathing. This place has taken my breath away, and I shall never get it back again until Arthur is out of this place.'

'How is that a reason for going off again to-morrow morning?'

'You shall understand,' said Mr Meagles. 'To-night we three will put up at a City Hotel. To-morrow morning, Mother and Tattycoram will go down to Twickenham, where Mrs Tickit, sitting attended by Dr

Buchan in the parlour-window, will think them a couple of ghosts; and I shall go abroad again for Doyce. We must have Dan here. Now, I tell you, my love, it's of no use writing and planning and conditionally speculating upon this and that and the other, at uncertain intervals and distances; we must have Doyce here. I devote myself at daybreak to-morrow morning, to bringing Doyce here. It's nothing to me to go and find him. I'm an old traveller, and all foreign languages and customs are alike to me - I never understand anything about any of 'em. Therefore I can't be put to any inconvenience. Go at once I must, it stands to reason; because I can't live without breathing freely; and I can't breathe freely until Arthur is out of this Marshalsea. I am stifled at the present moment, and have scarcely breath enough to say this much, and to carry this precious box down-stairs for you.'

They got into the street as the bell began to ring, Mr Meagles carrying the box. Little Dorrit had no conveyance there: which rather surprised him. He called a coach for her and she got into it, and he placed the box beside her when she was seated. In her joy and gratitude she kissed his hand.

'I don't like that, my dear,' said Mr Meagles. 'It goes against my feeling of what's right, that YOU should do homage to ME - at the Marshalsea Gate.'

She bent forward, and kissed his cheek.

'You remind me of the days,' said Mr Meagles, suddenly drooping - 'but she's very fond of him, and hides his faults, and thinks that no one sees them - and he certainly is well connected and of a very good family!'

It was the only comfort he had in the loss of his daughter, and if he made the most of it, who could blame him?