

Dickens Charles

# **Dickens' Stories About Children Every Child Can Read**



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# Содержание

PREFACE	5
I.	6
II.	11
III.	14
IV.	19
V.	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	29

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## **PREFACE**

To the Young Reader:

Charles Dickens was one of the greatest among the many story-writers of "the Victorian age;" that is, the middle and latter part of the Nineteenth Century, when Victoria was Queen of Great Britain. Perhaps he was the greatest of them all for now, a generation after he passed away, more people read the stories of Dickens than those by any other author of that period. In those wonderful writings are found many pictures of child-life connected with the plan of the novels or stories. These child-stories have been taken out of their connections and are told by themselves in this volume. By and by you will read for yourselves, "The Christmas Carol," "The Chimes," "David Copperfield," "The Old Curiosity Shop," and the other great books by that fascinating writer, who saw people whom nobody else ever saw, and made them real. When you read those books you will meet again these charming children, and will remember them as the friends of your childhood.

*Jesse L. Hurlbut.*

## I. TROTTY VECK AND HIS DAUGHTER MEG

"TROTTY" seems a strange name for an old man, but it was given to Toby Veck because of his always going at a trot to do his errands; for he was a ticket porter or messenger and his office was to take letters and messages for people who were in too great a hurry to send them by post, which in those days was neither so cheap nor so quick as it is now. He did not earn very much, and had to be out in all weathers and all day long. But Toby was of a cheerful disposition, and looked on the bright side of everything, and was grateful for any small mercies that came in his way; and so was happier than many people who never knew what it is to be hungry or in want of comforts. His greatest joy was his dear, bright, pretty daughter Meg, who loved him dearly.

One cold day, near the end of the year, Toby had been waiting a long time for a job, trotting up and down in his usual place before the church, and trying hard to keep himself warm, when the bells chimed twelve o'clock, which made Toby think of dinner.

"There's nothing," he remarked, carefully feeling his nose to make sure it was still there, "more regular in coming round than dinner-time, and nothing less regular in coming round than dinner. That's the great difference between 'em." He went on talking to himself, trotting up and down, and never noticing who was coming near to him.

"Why, father, father," said a pleasant voice, and Toby turned to find his daughter's sweet, bright eyes close to his.

"Why, pet," said he, kissing her and squeezing her blooming face between his hands, "what's to-do? I didn't expect you to-day, Meg."

"Neither did I expect to come, father," said Meg, nodding and smiling. "But here I am! And not alone, not alone!"

"Why you don't mean to say," observed Trotty, looking curiously at the covered basket she carried, "that you –"

"Smell it, father dear," said Meg. "Only smell it!"

Trotty was going to lift up the cover at once, in a great hurry, when she gaily interposed her hand.

"No, no, no," said Meg, with the glee of a child. "Lengthen it out a little. Let me just lift up the corner; just a lit-tle, ti-ny cor-ner, you know," said Meg, suiting the action to the word with the utmost gentleness, and speaking very softly, as if she were afraid of being overheard by something inside the basket. "There, now; what's that?"

Toby took the shortest possible sniff at the edge of the basket, and cried out in rapture:

"Why, it's hot," he said.

But to Meg's great delight he could not guess what it was that smelt so good.

"Polonies? Trotters? Liver? Pigs' feet? Sausages?" he tried one after the other. At last he exclaimed in triumph. "Why, what am I a-thinking of? It's tripe."

And it was.

"And so," said Meg, "I'll lay the cloth at once, father; for I have brought the tripe in a basin, and tied the basin up in a pocket-handkerchief; and if I like to be proud for once, and spread that for a cloth, and call it a cloth, there's nobody to prevent me, is there father?"

"Not that I know of, my dear," said Toby; "but they're always a-bringing up some new law or other."

"And according to what I was reading you in the paper the other day, father, what the judge said, you know, we poor people are supposed to know them all. Ha, ha! What a mistake! My goodness me, how clever they think us!"

"Yes, my dear," cried Trotty; "and they'd be very fond of any one of us that *did* know 'em all. He'd grow fat upon the work he'd get, that man, and be popular with the gentlefolks in his neighborhood. Very much so!"

"He'd eat his dinner with an appetite, whoever he was, if it smelt like this," said Meg cheerfully. "Make haste, for there's a hot potato besides, and half a pint of fresh-drawn beer in a bottle. Where will you dine, father – on the post or on the steps? Dear, dear, how grand we are! Two places to choose from!"

"The steps to-day, my pet," said Trotty. "Steps in dry weather, post in wet. There's greater convenience in the steps at all times, because of the sitting down; but they're rheumatic in the damp."

"Then, here," said Meg, clapping her hands after a moment's bustle; "here it is all ready! And beautiful it looks! Come, father. Come!"

And just as Toby was about to sit down to his dinner on the door-steps of a big house close by, the chimes rang out again, and Toby took off his hat and said, "Amen."

"Amen to the bells, father?"

"They broke in like a grace, my dear," said Trotty; "they'd say a good one if they could, I'm sure. Many's the kind thing they say to me. How often have I heard them bells say, 'Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby!' A million times? More!"

"Well, I never!" cried Meg.

"When things is very bad, then it's 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby!'"

"And it comes – at last, father," said Meg, with a touch of sadness in her pleasant voice.

"Always," answered Toby. "Never fails."

While this discourse was holding, Trotty made no pause in his attack upon the savory meat before him, but cut and ate, and cut and drank, and cut and chewed, and dodged about from tripe to hot potato, and from hot potato back again to tripe, with an unfailing relish. But happening now to look all round the street – in case anybody should be beckoning from any door or window for a porter – his eyes, in coming back again, saw Meg sitting opposite him, with her arms folded, and only busy in watching his dinner with a smile of happiness.

"Why, Lord forgive me!" said Trotty, dropping his knife and fork. "My dove! Meg! why didn't you tell me what a beast I was?"

"Father!"

"Sitting here," said Trotty, in a sorrowful manner, "cramming, and stuffing, and gorging myself, and you before me there, never so much as breaking your precious fast, nor wanting to, when –"

"But I have broken it, father," interposed his daughter, laughing, "all to bits. I have had my dinner."

"Nonsense," said Trotty. "Two dinners in one day! It ain't possible! You might as well tell me that two New Year's days will come together, or that I have had a gold head all my life, and never changed it."

"I have had my dinner, father, for all that," said Meg, coming nearer to him. "And if you will go on with yours, I'll tell you how and where, and how your dinner came to be brought and – and something else besides."

Toby still appeared not to believe her; but she looked into his face with her clear eyes, and, laying her hand upon his shoulder, motioned him to go on while the meat was hot. So Trotty took up his knife and fork again and went to work, but much more slowly than before, and shaking his head, as if he were not at all pleased with himself.

"I had my dinner, father," said Meg, after a little hesitation, "with – with Richard. His dinner-time was early; and as he brought his dinner with him when he came to see me, we – we had it together, father."

Trotty took a little beer and smacked his lips. Then he said "Oh!" because she waited.

"And Richard says, father – " Meg resumed, then stopped.

"What does Richard say, Meg?" asked Toby.

"Richard says, father – " Another stoppage.

"Richard's a long time saying it," said Toby.

"He says, then, father," Meg continued, lifting up her eyes at last, and speaking in a tremble, but quite plainly, "another year is nearly gone, and where is the use of waiting on from year to year, when it is so unlikely we shall ever be better off than we are now? He says we are poor now, father, and we shall be poor then; but we are young now, and years will make us old before we know it. He says that if we wait, people as poor as we are, until we see our way quite clearly, the way will be a narrow one indeed – the common way – the grave, father."

A bolder man than Trotty Veck must needs have drawn upon his boldness largely to deny it. Trotty held his peace.

"And how hard, father, to grow old and die, and think we might have cheered and helped each other! How hard in all our lives to love each other, and to grieve, apart, to see each other working, changing, growing old and gray. Even if I got the better of it, and forgot him (which I never could), oh, father, dear, how hard to have a heart so full as mine is now, and live to have it slowly drained out every drop, without remembering one happy moment of a woman's life to stay behind and comfort me and make me better!"

Trotty sat quite still. Meg dried her eyes, and said more gaily – that is to say, with here a laugh and there a sob, and here a laugh and sob together:

"So Richard says, father, as his work was yesterday made certain for some time to come, and as I love him and have loved him full three years – ah, longer than that, if he knew it! – will I marry him on New Year's Day?"

Just then Richard himself came up to persuade Toby to agree to their plan; and, almost at the same moment, a footman came out of the house and ordered them all off the steps, and some gentlemen came out who called up Trotty, and asked a great many questions, and found a good deal of fault, telling Richard he was very foolish to want to get married, which made Toby feel very unhappy, and Richard very angry. So the lovers went off together sadly; Richard looking gloomy and downcast, and Meg in tears. Toby, who had a letter given him to carry, and a sixpence, trotted off in rather low spirits to a very grand house, where he was told to take the letter in to the gentleman. While he was waiting, he heard the letter read. It was from Alderman Cute, to tell Sir Joseph Bowley that one of his tenants named Will Fern, who had come to London to try to get work, and been brought before him charged with sleeping in a shed, and asking if Sir Joseph wished him to be dealt kindly with or otherwise. To Toby's great disappointment, for Sir Joseph had talked a great deal about being a friend to the poor, the answer was given that Will Fern might be sent to prison as a vagabond, and made an example of, though his only fault was that he was poor. On his way home, Toby, thinking sadly, with his hat pulled down low on his head, ran against a man dressed like a country-man, carrying a fair-haired little girl. Toby enquired anxiously if he had hurt either of them. The man answered no, and seeing Toby had a kind face, he asked him the way to Alderman Cute's house.

"It's impossible," cried Toby, "that your name is Will Fern?"

"That's my name," said the man.

Thereupon Toby told him what he had just heard, and said, "Don't go there."

Poor Will told him how he could not make a living in the country, and had come to London with his orphan niece to try to find a friend of her mother's and to endeavor to get some work, and, wishing Toby a happy New Year, was about to trudge wearily off again, when Trotty caught his hand, saying —



"Stay! The New Year never can be happy to me if I see the child and you go wandering away without a shelter for your heads. Come home with me. I'm a poor man, living in a poor place; but I can give you lodging for one night, and never miss it. Come home with me! Here! I'll take her!" cried Trotty, lifting up the child. "A pretty one! I'd carry twenty times her weight and never know I'd got it. Tell me if I go too quick for you. I'm very fast. I always was!" Trotty said this, taking about six of his trotting paces to one stride of his tired companion, and with his thin legs quivering again beneath the load he bore.

"Why, she's as light," said Trotty, trotting in his speech as well as in his gait – for he couldn't bear to be thanked, and dreaded a moment's pause – "as light as a feather. Lighter than a peacock's feather – a great deal lighter. Here we are and here we go!" And, rushing in, he set the child down before his daughter. The little girl gave one look at Meg's sweet face and ran into her arms at once, while Trotty ran round the room, saying, "Here we are and here we go. Here, Uncle Will, come to the fire. Meg, my precious darling, where's the kettle? Here it is and here it goes, and it'll bile in no time!"

"Why, father!" said Meg, as she knelt before the child and pulled off her wet shoes, "you're crazy to-night, I think. I don't know what the bells would say to that. Poor little feet, how cold they are!"

"Oh, they're warmer now!" exclaimed the child. "They're quite warm now!"

"No, no, no," said Meg. "We haven't rubbed 'em half enough. We're so busy. And when they're done, we'll brush out the damp hair; and when that's done, we'll bring some color to the poor pale face with fresh water; and when that's done, we'll be so gay and brisk and happy!"

The child, sobbing, clasped her round the neck, saying, "O Meg, O dear Meg!"

"Good gracious me!" said Meg presently, "father's crazy. He's put the dear child's bonnet on the kettle, and hung the lid behind the door!"

Trotty hastily repaired this mistake, and went off to find some tea and a rasher of bacon he fancied "he had seen lying somewhere on the stairs."

He soon came back and made the tea, and before long they were all enjoying the meal. Trotty and Meg only took a morsel for form's sake (for they had only a very little, not enough for all), but their delight was in seeing their visitors eat, and very happy they were – though Trotty had noticed that Meg was sitting by the fire in tears when they had come in, and he feared her marriage had been broken off.

After tea Meg took Lilian to bed, and Toby showed Will Fern where he was to sleep. As he came back past Meg's door he heard the child saying her prayers, remembering Meg's name and asking for his. Then he went to sit by the fire and read his paper, and fell asleep to have a wonderful dream, so terrible and sad, that it was a great relief when he woke.

"And whatever you do, father," said Meg, "don't eat tripe again without asking some doctor whether it's likely to agree with you; for how you *have* been going on! Good gracious!"

She was working with her needle at the little table by the fire, dressing her simple gown with ribbons for her wedding – so quietly happy, so blooming and youthful, so full of beautiful promise that he uttered a great cry as if it were an angel in his house, then flew to clasp her in his arms.

But he caught his feet in the newspaper, which had fallen on the hearth, and somebody came rushing in between them.

"No!" cried the voice of this same somebody. A generous and jolly voice it was! "Not even you; not even you. The first kiss of Meg in the New Year is mine – mine! I have been waiting outside the house this hour to hear the bells and claim it. Meg, my precious prize, a happy year! A life of happy years, my darling wife!"

And Richard smothered her with kisses.

You never in all your life saw anything like Trotty after this, I don't care where you have lived or what you have seen; you never in your life saw anything at all approaching him! He kept

running up to Meg, and squeezing her fresh face between his hands and kissing it, going from her backwards not to lose sight of it, and running up again like a figure in a magic lantern; and whatever he did, he was constantly sitting himself down in his chair, and never stopping in it for one single moment, being – that's the truth – beside himself with joy.

"And to-morrow's your wedding-day, my pet!" cried Trotty. "Your real, happy wedding-day!"

"To-day!" cried Richard, shaking hands with him. "To-day. The chimes are ringing in the New Year. Hear them!"

They *were* ringing! Bless their sturdy hearts, they *were* ringing! Great bells as they were – melodious, deep-mouthed, noble bells, cast in no common metal, made by no common founder – when had they ever chimed like that before?

Trotty was backing off to that wonderful chair again, when the child, who had been awakened by the noise, came running in half-dressed.

"Why, here she is!" cried Trotty, catching her up. "Here's little Lilian! Ha, ha, ha! Here we are and here we go. Oh, here we are and here we go again! And here we are and here we go! And Uncle Will, too!"

Before Will Fern could make the least reply, a band of music burst into the room, attended by a flock of neighbors, screaming, "A Happy New Year, Meg!" "A happy wedding!" "Many of 'em!" and other fragmentary good-wishes of that sort. The Drum (who was a private friend of Trotty's) then stepped forward and said:

"Trotty Veck, my boy, it's got about that your daughter is going to be married to-morrow. There ain't a soul that knows you that don't wish you well, or that knows her and don't wish her well. Or that knows you both, and don't wish you both all the happiness the New Year can bring. And here we are to play it in and dance it in accordingly."

Then Mrs. Chickenstalker came in (a good-humored, nice-looking woman who, to the delight of all, turned out to be the friend of Lilian's mother, for whom Will Fern had come to look), with a stone pitcher full of "flip," to wish Meg joy, and then the music struck up, and Trotty, making Meg and Richard second couple, led off Mrs. Chickenstalker down the dance, and danced it in a step unknown before or since, founded on his own peculiar trot.

## II. TINY TIM

IT will surprise you all very much to hear that there was once a man who did not like Christmas. In fact, he had been heard on several occasions to use the word *humbug* with regard to it. His name was Scrooge, and he was a hard, sour-tempered man of business, intent only on saving and making money, and caring nothing for anyone. He paid the poor, hard-working clerk in his office as little as he could possibly get the work done for, and lived on as little as possible himself, alone, in two dismal rooms. He was never merry or comfortable or happy, and he hated other people to be so, and that was the reason why he hated Christmas, because people *will* be happy at Christmas, you know, if they possibly can, and like to have a little money to make themselves and others comfortable.

Well, it was Christmas eve, a very cold and foggy one, and Mr. Scrooge, having given his poor clerk permission very unwillingly to spend Christmas day at home, locked up his office and went home himself in a very bad temper, and with a cold in his head. After having taken some gruel as he sat over a miserable fire in his dismal room, he got into bed, and had some wonderful and disagreeable dreams, to which we will leave him, whilst we see how Tiny Tim, the son of his poor clerk, spent Christmas day.

The name of this clerk was Bob Cratchit. He had a wife and five other children besides Tim, who was a weak and delicate little cripple, and for this reason was dearly loved by his father and the rest of the family; not but what he was a dear little boy, too, gentle and patient and loving, with a sweet face of his own, which no one could help looking at.

Whenever he could spare the time, it was Mr. Cratchit's delight to carry his little boy out on his shoulder to see the shops and the people; and to-day he had taken him to church for the first time.

"Whatever has got your precious father and your brother Tiny Tim!" exclaimed Mrs. Cratchit, "here's dinner all ready to be dished up. I've never known him so late on Christmas day before."

"Here he is, mother!" cried Belinda, and "here he is!" cried the other children.

In came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter, exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look just as well as possible; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

"Why, where's our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming!" said Bob, with a sudden dropping in his high spirits; for he had been Tim's blood horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant. "Not coming upon Christmas day!"

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out sooner than had been agreed upon from behind the closet-door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper kettle.

"And how did Tim behave?" asked Mrs. Cratchit.

"As good as gold and better," replied his father. "I think, wife, the child gets thoughtful, sitting at home so much. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people in church who saw he was a cripple, would be pleased to remember on Christmas day who it was who made the lame to walk."

"Bless his sweet heart!" said the mother in a trembling voice, and the father's voice trembled, too, as he remarked that "Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty at last."

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, led by his brother and sister to his stool beside the fire; while Bob, Master Peter, and the two young Cratchits (who seemed to be everywhere at once) went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a perfect marvel, to which a black swan was a matter of course – and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with tremendous vigor; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and, mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavor, size, and cheapness were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at that! Yet everyone had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits, in particular, were steeped in sage and onions to the eyebrows! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone – too nervous to bear witnesses – to take up the pudding and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back yard and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose – a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Halloo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastrycook's next door to each other, with a laundress' next door to that! That was the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered – flushed, but smiling proudly – with the pudding like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of lighted brandy, and decorated with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that, now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was a small pudding for a large family. It would have been really wicked to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The hot stuff in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass. Two tumblers and a custard cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed:

"A merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

Which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us everyone!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

Now I told you that Mr. Scrooge had some disagreeable and wonderful dreams on Christmas eve, and so he had; and in one of them he dreamt that a Christmas spirit showed him his clerk's home; he saw them all gathered round the fire, and heard them drink his health, and Tiny Tim's song, and he took special note of Tiny Tim himself.

How Mr. Scrooge spent Christmas day we do not know. He may have remained in bed, having a cold, but on Christmas night he had more dreams, and in one of his dreams the spirit took him again to his clerk's poor home. The mother was doing some needlework, seated by the table, a tear dropped on it now and then, and she said, poor thing, that the work, which was black, hurt her eyes. The children sat, sad and silent, about the room, except Tiny Tim, who was not there. Upstairs the father, with his face hidden in his hands, sat beside a little bed, on which lay a tiny figure, white and still. "My little child, my pretty little child," he sobbed, as the tears fell through his fingers on to the floor. "Tiny Tim died because his father was too poor to give him what was necessary to make him well; *you* kept him poor;" said the dream-spirit to Mr. Scrooge. The father kissed the cold, little face on the bed, and went downstairs, where the sprays of holly still remained about the humble room; and taking his hat, went out, with a wistful glance at the little crutch in the corner as he shut the door. Mr. Scrooge saw all this, and many more things as strange and sad, the spirit took care of that; but, wonderful to relate, he woke the next morning feeling a different man – feeling as he had never felt in his life before. For after all, you know that what he had seen was no more than a dream; he knew that Tiny Tim was not dead, and Scrooge was resolved that Tiny Tim should not die if he could help it.

"Why, I am as light as a feather, and as happy as an angel, and as merry as a schoolboy," Scrooge said to himself as he skipped into the next room to breakfast and threw on all the coals at once, and put two lumps of sugar in his tea. "I hope everybody had a merry Christmas, and here's a happy New Year to all the world."

On that morning, the day after Christmas poor Bob Cratchit crept into the office a few minutes late, expecting to be roundly abused and scolded for it, but no such thing; his master was there with his back to a good fire, and actually smiling, and he shook hands with his clerk, telling him heartily he was going to raise his salary and asking quite affectionately after Tiny Tim! "And mind you make up a good fire in your room before you set to work, Bob," he said, as he closed his own door.

Bob could hardly believe his eyes and ears, but it was all true. Such doings as they had on New Year's day had never been seen before in the Cratchits' home, nor such a turkey as Mr. Scrooge sent them for dinner. Tiny Tim had his share too, for Tiny Tim did not die, not a bit of it. Mr. Scrooge was a second father to him from that day, he wanted for nothing, and grew up strong and hearty. Mr. Scrooge loved him, and well he might, for was it not Tiny Tim who had without knowing it, through the Christmas dream-spirit, touched his hard heart and caused him to become a good and happy man?

### III.

## THE RUNAWAY COUPLE

THE Boots at the Holly Tree Inn was the young man named Cobbs, who blacked the shoes, and ran errands, and waited on the people at the inn; and this is the story that he told, one day.

"Supposing a young gentleman not eight years old was to run away with a fine young woman of seven, would you consider that a queer start? That there is a start as I – the Boots at the Holly Tree Inn – have seen with my own eyes; and I cleaned the shoes they ran away in, and they was so little that I couldn't get my hand into 'em.

"Master Harry Walmers' father, he lived at the Elms, away by Shooter's Hill, six or seven miles from London. He was uncommon proud of Master Harry, as he was his only child; but he didn't spoil him neither. He was a gentleman that had a will of his own, and an eye of his own, and that would be minded. Consequently, though he made quite a companion of the fine bright boy, still he kept the command over him, and the child *was* a child. I was under-gardener there at that time; and one morning Master Harry, he comes to me and says —

"Cobbs, how should you spell Norah, if you was asked?" and then begun cutting it in print, all over the fence.

"He couldn't say he had taken particular notice of children before that; but really it was pretty to see them two mites a-going about the place together, deep in love. And the courage of the boy! Bless your soul, he'd have throwed off his little hat, and tucked up his little sleeves, and gone in at a lion, he would, if they had happened to meet one and she had been frightened of him. One day he stops along, with her, where Boots was hoeing weeds in the gravel, and says – speaking up, 'Cobbs,' he says, 'I like you.' 'Do you, sir? I'm proud to hear it.' 'Yes, I do, Cobbs. Why do I like you, do you think, Cobbs?' 'Don't know, Master Harry, I am sure.' 'Because Norah likes you, Cobbs.' 'Indeed, sir? That's very gratifying.' 'Gratifying, Cobbs? It's better than millions of the brightest diamonds to be liked by Norah.' 'Certainly, sir.' 'You're going away, ain't you, Cobbs?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Would you like another situation, Cobbs?' 'Well, sir, I shouldn't object, if it was a good 'un.' 'Then, Cobbs,' says he, 'you shall be our head-gardener when we are married.' And he tucks her, in her little sky-blue mantle, under his arm, and walks away.

"It was better than a picter, and equal to a play, to see them babies with their long, bright, curling hair, their sparkling eyes, and their beautiful light tread, a-rambling about the garden, deep in love. Boots was of opinion that the birds believed they was birds, and kept up with 'em, singing to please 'em. Sometimes, they would creep under the Tulip tree, and would sit there with their arms round one another's necks, and their soft cheeks touching, a-reading about the prince and the dragon, and the good and bad enchanters, and the king's fair daughter. Sometimes he would hear them planning about having a house in a forest, keeping bees and a cow, and living entirely on milk and honey. Once he came upon them by the pond, and heard Master Harry say, 'Adorable Norah, kiss me, and say you love me to distraction, or I'll jump in headforemost.' And Boots made no question he would have done it, if she hadn't done as he asked her.

"Cobbs,' says Master Harry, one evening, when Cobbs was watering the flowers, 'I am going on a visit, this present mid-summer, to my grandmamma's at York.'

"Are you, indeed, sir? I hope you'll have a pleasant time. I am going into Yorkshire myself when I leave here.'

"Are you going to your grandmamma's, Cobbs?'

"No, sir. I haven't got such a thing.'

"Not as a grandmamma, Cobbs?'

"No, sir.'

"The boy looked on at the watering of the flowers for a little while and then said, 'I shall be very glad, indeed, to go, Cobbs – Norah's going.'

"'You'll be all right then, sir,' says Cobbs, 'with your beautiful sweetheart by your side.'

"'Cobbs,' returned the boy, flushing, 'I never let anybody joke about it when I can prevent them.'

"'It wasn't a joke, sir,' says Cobbs, with humility – 'wasn't so meant.'

"'I am glad of that, Cobbs, because I like you! you know, and you're going to live with us, Cobbs.

"'Sir.'

"'What do you think my grandmamma gives me, when I go down there?'

"'I couldn't so much as make a guess, sir.'

"'A Bank of England five-pound note, Cobbs.'

"'Whew!' says Cobbs, 'that's a spanking sum of money, Master Harry.'

"'A person could do a great deal with such a sum of money as that. Couldn't a person, Cobbs?'

"'I believe you, sir!'

"'Cobbs,' said the boy, 'I'll tell you a secret. At Norah's house they have been joking her about me, and pretending to laugh at our being engaged. Pretending to make game of it, Cobbs!'

"'Such, sir,' says Cobbs, 'is the wickedness of human natur'.'

"The boy, looking exactly like his father, stood for a few minutes with his glowing face towards the sunset, and then departed with, 'Good night, Cobbs. I'm going in.'

"I was the Boots at the Holly Tree Inn when one summer afternoon the coach drives up, and out of the coach gets these two children.

"The guard says to our governor, the inn-keeper, 'I don't quite make out these little passengers, but the young gentleman's words was, that they were to be brought here.' The young gentleman gets out; hands his lady out; gives the driver something for himself; says to our governor, 'We're to stop here to-night, please. Sitting-room and two bedrooms will be required. Chops and cherry-pudding for two!' and tucks her, in her little sky-blue mantle, under his arm, and walks into the house much bolder than brass.

"Boots leaves me to judge what the amazement of that establishment was when those two tiny creatures, all alone by themselves, was marched into the parlor – much more so when he, who had seen them without their seeing him, gave the governor his views of the errand they was upon. 'Cobbs,' says the governor, 'if this is so, I must set off myself to York and quiet their friends' minds. In which case you must keep your eye upon 'em, and humor 'em, till I come back. But, before I take these measures, Cobbs, I should wish you to find out from themselves whether your opinions is correct.' 'Sir, to you,' says Cobbs, 'that shall be done directly.'

"So Boots goes up stairs to the parlor, and there he finds Master Harry on an enormous sofa a-drying the eyes of Miss Norah with his pocket-hankecher. Their little legs were entirely off the ground of course, and it really is not possible for Boots to express to me how small them children looked.

"'It's Cobbs! It's Cobbs!' cries Master Harry, and comes running to him, and catching hold of his hand. Miss Norah comes running to him on t'other side, and catching hold of his t'other hand, and they both jump for joy.

"'I see you a-getting out, sir,' says Cobbs. 'I thought it was you. I thought I couldn't be mistaken in your height and figure. What's the object of your journey, sir? Are you going to be married?'

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<sup>1</sup> For the benefit of some of our young readers, it may be well to explain that this is about the same as a bill of twenty-five dollars would be in America.

"'We are going to be married, Cobbs, at Gretna Green,' returned the boy. 'We have run away on purpose. Norah has been in rather low spirits, Cobbs; but she'll be happy, now we have found you to be our friend.'

"'Thank you, sir, and thank *you*, miss,' says Cobbs, 'for your good opinion. Did you bring any luggage with you, sir?'

"'If I will believe Boots when he gives me his word and honor upon it, the lady had got a parasol, a smelling-bottle, a round and a half of cold buttered toast, eight peppermint drops, and a hair-brush – seemingly a doll's. The gentleman had got about half a dozen yards of string, a knife, three or four sheets of writing-paper folded up surprisingly small, an orange, and a china mug with his name upon it.

"'What may be the exact natur' of your plans, sir?' says Cobbs.

"'To go on,' replied the boy – which the courage of that boy was something wonderful! – 'in the morning, and be married to-morrow.'

"'Just so, sir,' says Cobbs. 'Would it meet your views, sir, if I was to go with you?'

"'When Cobbs said this, they both jumped for joy again, and cried out, 'Oh, yes, yes, Cobbs! Yes!'

"'Well, sir,' says Cobbs. 'If you will excuse my having the freedom to give an opinion, what I should recommend would be this. I'm acquainted with a pony, sir, which, put in a phaeton that I could borrow, would take you and Mrs. Harry Walmers, Jr. (myself driving, if you agree), to the end of your journey in a very short space of time. I am not altogether sure, sir, that this pony will be at liberty to-morrow, but even if you had to wait over to-morrow for him, it might be worth your while. As to the small account for your board here, sir, in case you was to find yourself running at all short, that don't signify, because I'm a part proprietor of this inn, and it could stand over.'

"'Boots tells me that when they clapped their hands and jumped for joy again, and called him, 'Good Cobbs!' and 'Dear Cobbs!' and bent across him to kiss one another in the delight of their trusting hearts, he felt himself the meanest rascal for deceiving 'em that ever was born.

"'Is there anything you want just at present, sir?' says Cobbs, mortally ashamed of himself.

"'We would like some cakes after dinner,' answered Master Harry, folding his arms, putting out one leg, and looking straight at him, 'and two apples – and jam. With dinner, we should like to have toast and water. But Norah has always been accustomed to half a glass of currant wine at dessert. And so have I.'

"'It shall be ordered at the bar, sir,' says Cobbs, and away he went.

"'The way in which the women of that house – without exception – everyone of 'em – married and single, took to that boy when they heard the story, Boots considers surprising. It was as much as he could do to keep 'em from dashing into the room and kissing him. They climbed up all sorts of places, at the risk of their lives, to look at him through a pane of glass. They were seven deep at the key-hole. They were out of their minds about him and his bold spirit.

"'In the evening Boots went into the room, to see how the runaway couple was getting on. The gentleman was on the window-seat, supporting the lady in his arms. She had tears upon her face, and was lying, very tired and half-asleep, with her head upon his shoulder.

"'Mrs. Harry Walmers, Jr., tired, sir?' says Cobbs.

"'Yes, she is tired, Cobbs; but she is not used to be away from home, and she has been in low spirits again. Cobbs, do you think you could bring a biffin, please?'

"'I ask your pardon, sir,' says Cobbs. 'What was it you –'

"'I think a Norfolk biffin<sup>2</sup> would rouse her, Cobbs. She is very fond of them.'

"'Boots withdrew in search of the required restorative, and, when he brought it in, the gentleman handed it to the lady, and fed her with a spoon, and took a little himself. The lady

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<sup>2</sup> A biffin is a red apple, growing near Norfolk, and generally eaten after having been baked.



being heavy with sleep, and rather cross. 'What should you think, sir,' says Cobbs, 'of a chamber candlestick?' The gentleman approved; the chambermaid went first, up the great staircase; the lady, in her sky-blue mantle, followed, gallantly led by the gentleman; the gentleman kissed her at the door, and retired to his own room, where Boots softly locked him up.

"Boots couldn't but feel what a base deceiver he was when they asked him at breakfast (they had ordered sweet milk-and-water, and toast and currant jelly, overnight) about the pony. It really was as much as he could do, he don't mind confessing to me, to look them two young things in the face, and think how wicked he had grown up to be. Howsomever, he went on a-lying like a Trojan, about the pony. He told 'em it did so unfortunately happen that the pony was half-clipped, you see, and that he couldn't be taken out in that state for fear that it should strike to his inside. But that he'd be finished clipping in the course of the day, and that to-morrow morning at eight o'clock the phaeton would be ready. Boots' view of the whole case, looking back upon it in my room, is, that Mrs. Harry Walmers, Jr., was beginning to give in. She hadn't had her hair curled when she went to bed, and she didn't seem quite up to brushing it herself, and it's getting in her eyes put her out. But nothing put out Master Harry. He sat behind his breakfast cup, a-tearing away at the jelly, as if he had been his own father.

"After breakfast Boots is inclined to think that they drawed soldiers – at least, he knows that many such was found in the fireplace, all on horseback. In the course of the morning Master Harry rang the bell – it was surprising how that there boy did carry on – and said in a sprightly way, 'Cobbs, is there any good walks in this neighborhood?'

""Yes, sir,' says Cobbs. 'There's Love Lane.'

""Get out with you, Cobbs!' – that was that there boy's expression – 'you're joking.'

""Begging your pardon, sir,' says Cobbs, 'there really is Love Lane. And a pleasant walk it is, and proud I shall be to show it to yourself and Mrs. Harry Walmers, Jr.'

""Norah, dear,' said Master Harry, 'this is curious. We really ought to see Love Lane. Put on your bonnet, my sweetest darling, and we will go there with Cobbs.'

"Boots leaves me to judge what a beast he felt himself to be, when that young pair told him, as they all three jogged along together, that they had made up their minds to give him two thousand guineas a year as head-gardener, on account of his being so true a friend to 'em. Boots could have wished at the moment that the earth would have opened and swallowed him up; he felt so mean with their beaming eyes a-looking at him, and believing him. Well, sir, he turned the conversation as well as he could, and he took 'em down Love Lane to the water-meadows, and there Master Harry would have drowned himself in half a moment more, a-getting out a water-lily for her – but nothing frightened that boy. Well, sir, they was tired out. All being so new and strange to 'em, they was tired as tired could be. And they laid down on a bank of daisies, like the children in the wood, leastways meadows, and fell asleep.

"Well, sir, they woke up at last, and then one thing was getting pretty clear to Boots, namely, that Mrs. Harry Walmers', Jr., temper was on the move. When Master Harry took her round the waist she said he 'teased her so,' and when he says, 'Norah, my young May Moon, your Harry tease you?' she tells him, 'Yes; and I want to go home!'

"However, Master Harry he kept up, and his noble heart was as fond as ever. Mrs. Walmers turned very sleepy about dusk and began to cry. Therefore, Mrs. Walmers went off to bed as per yesterday; and Master Harry ditto repeated.

"About eleven or twelve at night comes back the inn-keeper in a chaise, along with Mr. Walmers and an elderly lady. Mr. Walmers looks amused and very serious, both at once, and says to our missis, 'We are very much indebted to you, ma'am, for your kind care of our little children, which we can never sufficiently acknowledge. Pray, ma'am where is my boy?' Our missis says, 'Cobbs has the dear children in charge, sir. Cobbs, show forty!' Then he says to Cobbs, 'Ah, Cobbs! I am glad to see *you*. I understand you was here!' And Cobbs says, 'Yes, sir. Your most obedient, sir.'

"I may be surprised to hear Boots say it, perhaps, but Boots assures me that his heart beat like a hammer, going up-stairs. 'I beg your pardon, sir,' says he, while unlocking the door; 'I hope you are not angry with Master Harry. For Master Harry is a fine boy, sir, and will do you credit and honor.' And Boots signifies to me that if the fine boy's father had contradicted him in the daring state of mind in which he then was, he thinks he should have 'fetched him a crack,' and taken the consequences.

"But Mr. Walmers only says, 'No, Cobbs. No, my good fellow. Thank you!' And the door being open, goes in.

"Boots goes in too, holding the light, and he sees Mr. Walmers go up to the bedside, bend gently down, and kiss the little sleeping face. Then he stands looking at it for a minute, looking wonderfully like it; and then he gently shakes the little shoulder.

"'Harry, my dear boy! Harry!'

"Master Harry starts up and looks at him. Looks at Cobbs, too. Such is the honor of that mite that he looks at Cobbs to see whether he has brought him into trouble.

"'I am not angry, my child. I only want you to dress yourself and come home.'

"'Yes, pa.'

"Master Harry dresses himself quickly. His breast begins to swell when he has nearly finished, and it swells more and more as he stands a-looking at his father; his father standing a-looking at him, the quiet image of him.

"'Please may I' – the spirit of that little creatur', and the way he kept his rising tears down! – 'Please, dear pa – may I – kiss Norah before I go?'

"'You may, my child.'

"So he takes Master Harry in his hand, and Boots leads the way with the candle, and they come to that other bedroom; where the elderly lady is seated by the bed, and poor little Mrs. Harry Walmers, Jr., is fast asleep. There the father lifts the child up to the pillow, and he lays his little face down for an instant by the little warm face of poor unconscious little Mrs. Harry Walmers, Jr., and gently draws it to him – a sight so touching to the chambermaids who are peeping through the door that one of them calls out, 'It's a shame to part 'em!' But this chambermaid was always, as Boots informs me, a soft-hearted one. Not that there was any harm in that girl. Far from it."

## IV. LITTLE DORRIT

MANY years ago, when people could be put in prison for debt, a poor gentleman, who was unfortunate enough to lose all his money, was brought to the Marshalsea prison, which was the prison where debtors were kept. As there seemed no prospect of being able to pay his debts, his wife and their two little children came to live there with him. The elder child was a boy of three; the younger a little girl of two years old, and not long afterwards another little girl was born. The three children played in the courtyard, and on the whole were happy, for they were too young to remember a happier state of things.

But the youngest child, who had never been outside the prison walls, was a thoughtful little creature, and wondered what the outside world could be like. Her great friend, the turnkey, who was also her godfather, became very fond of her, and as soon as she could walk and talk he brought a little arm-chair and stood it by his fire at the lodge, and coaxed her with cheap toys to come and sit with him. In return the child loved him dearly, and would often bring her doll to dress and undress as she sat in the little arm-chair. She was still a very tiny creature when she began to understand that everyone did not live locked up inside high walls with spikes at the top, and though she and the rest of the family might pass through the door that the great key opened, her father could not; and she would look at him with a wondering pity in her tender little heart.

One day, she was sitting in the lodge gazing wistfully up at the sky through the barred window. The turnkey, after watching her some time, said:

"Thinking of the fields, ain't you?"

"Where are they?" she asked.

"Why, they're – over there, my dear," said the turnkey, waving his key vaguely, "just about there."

"Does anybody open them and shut them? Are they locked?"

"Well," said the turnkey, not knowing what to say, "not in general."

"Are they pretty, Bob?" She called him Bob, because he wished it.

"Lovely. Full of flowers. There's buttercups, and there's daisies, and there's – " here he hesitated not knowing the names of many flowers – "there's dandelions, and all manner of games."

"Is it very pleasant to be there, Bob?"

"Prime," said the turnkey.

"Was father ever there?"

"Hem!" coughed the turnkey. "O yes, he was there, sometimes."

"Is he sorry not to be there now?"

"N – not particular," said the turnkey.

"Nor any of the people?" she asked, glancing at the listless crowd within. "O are you quite sure and certain, Bob?"

At this point, Bob gave in and changed the subject to candy. But after this chat, the turnkey and little Amy would go out on his free Sunday afternoons to some meadows or green lanes, and she would pick grass and flowers to bring home, while he smoked his pipe; and then they would go to some tea-gardens for shrimps and tea and other delicacies, and would come back hand in hand, unless she was very tired and had fallen asleep on his shoulder.

When Amy was only eight years old, her mother died; and the poor father was more helpless and broken-down than ever, and as Fanny was a careless child and Edward idle, the little one, who had the bravest and truest heart, was led by her love and unselfishness to be the little mother of the forlorn family, and struggled to get some little education for herself and her brother and sister.

At first, such a baby could do little more than sit with her father, deserting her livelier place by the high fender, and quietly watching him. But this made her so far necessary to him that he became accustomed to her, and began to be sensible of missing her when she was not there. Through this little gate, she passed out of her childhood into the care-laden world.

What her pitiful look saw, at that early time, in her father, in her sister, in her brother, in the jail; how much or how little of the wretched truth it pleased God to make plain to her, lies hidden with many mysteries. It is enough that she was inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest. Inspired? Yes. Shall we speak of a poet or a priest, and not of the heart impelled by love and self-devotion to the lowliest work in the lowliest way of life?

The family stayed so long in the prison that the old man came to be known as "The Father of the Marshalsea;" and little Amy, who had never known any other home, as "The Child of the Marshalsea."

At thirteen she could read and keep accounts – that is, could put down in words and figures how much the bare necessities that they wanted would cost, and how much less they had to buy them with. She had been, by snatches of a few weeks at a time, to an evening school outside, and got her sister and brother sent to day-schools from time to time during three or four years. There was no teaching for any of them at home; but she knew well – no one better – that a man so broken as to be the Father of the Marshalsea, could be no father to his own children.

To these scanty means of improvement, she added another of her own contriving. Once among the crowd of prisoners there appeared a dancing-master. Her sister had a great desire to learn the dancing-master's art, and seemed to have a taste that way. At thirteen years old, the Child of the Marshalsea presented herself to the dancing-master, with a little bag in her hand, and offered her humble petition.

"If you please, I was born here, sir."

"Oh! you are the young lady, are you?" said the dancing-master, surveying the small figure and uplifted face.

"Yes, sir."

"And what can I do for you?" said the dancing-master.

"Nothing for me, sir, thank you," anxiously undrawing the strings of the little bag; "but if, while you stay here, you could be so kind as to teach my sister cheap –"

"My child, I'll teach her for nothing," said the dancing-master, shutting up the bag. He was as good-natured a dancing-master as ever danced to the Insolvent Court, and he kept his word. The sister was so apt a pupil, and the dancing-master had such abundant time to give her, that wonderful progress was made. Indeed, the dancing-master was so proud of it, and so wishful to show it before he left, to a few select friends among the collegians (the debtors in the prison were called "collegians"), that at six o'clock on a certain fine morning, an exhibition was held in the yard – the college-rooms being of too small size for the purpose – in which so much ground was covered, and the steps were so well executed, that the dancing-master, having to play his fiddle besides, was thoroughly tired out.

The success of this beginning, which led to the dancing-master's continuing his teaching after his release, led the poor child to try again. She watched and waited months for a seamstress. In the fullness of time a milliner came in, sent there like all the rest for a debt which she could not pay; and to her she went to ask a favor for herself.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," she said, looking timidly round the door of the milliner, whom she found in tears and in bed: "but I was born here."

Everybody seemed to hear of her as soon as they arrived; for the milliner sat up in bed, drying her eyes, and said, just as the dancing-master had said:

"Oh! *you* are the child, are you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I am sorry I haven't got anything for you," said the milliner, shaking her head.

"It's not that, ma'am. If you please, I want to learn needlework."

"Why should you do that," returned the milliner, "with me before you? It has not done me much good."

"Nothing – whatever it is – seems to have done anybody much good who comes here," she returned in her simple way; "but I want to learn, just the same."

"I am afraid you are so weak, you see," the milliner objected.

"I don't think I am weak, ma'am."

"And you are so very, very little, you see," the milliner objected.

"Yes, I am afraid I am very little indeed," returned the Child of the Marshalsea; and so began to sob over that unfortunate smallness of hers, which came so often in her way. The milliner – who was not unkind or hardhearted, only badly in debt – was touched, took her in hand with good-will, found her the most patient and earnest of pupils, and made her a good workwoman.

In course of time, the Father of the Marshalsea gradually developed a new trait of character. He was very greatly ashamed of having his two daughters work for their living; and tried to make it appear that they were only doing work for pleasure, not for pay. But at the same time he would take money from any one who would give it to him, without any sense of shame. With the same hand that had pocketed a fellow-prisoner's half-crown half an hour ago, he would wipe away the tears that streamed over his cheeks if anything was spoken of his daughters' earning their bread. So, over and above her other daily cares, the Child of the Marshalsea had always upon her the care of keeping up the make-believe that they were all idle beggars together.

The sister became a dancer. There was a ruined uncle in the family group – ruined by his brother, the Father of the Marshalsea, and knowing no more how, than his ruiner did, but taking the fact as something that could not be helped. Naturally a retired and simple man, he had shown no particular sense of being ruined, at the time when that calamity fell upon him, further than he left off washing himself when the shock was announced, and never took to washing his face and hands any more. He had been a rather poor musician in his better days; and when he fell with his brother, supported himself in a poor way by playing a clarionet as dirty as himself in a small theatre band. It was the theatre in which his niece became a dancer; he had been a fixture there a long time when she took her poor station in it; and he accepted the task of serving as her guardian, just as he would have accepted an illness, a legacy, a feast, starvation – anything but soap.

To enable this girl to earn her few weekly shillings, it was necessary for the Child of the Marshalsea to go through a careful form with her father.

"Fanny is not going to live with us, just now, father. She will be here a good deal in the day, but she is going to live outside with uncle."

"You surprise me. Why?"

"I think uncle wants a companion, father. He should be attended to and looked after."

"A companion? He passes much of his time here. And you attend and look after him, Amy, a great deal more than ever your sister will. You all go out so much; you all go out so much."

This was to keep up the form and pretense of his having no idea that Amy herself went out by the day to work.

"But we are always very glad to come home father; now, are we not? And as to Fanny, perhaps besides keeping uncle company and taking care of him, it may be as well for her not quite to live here always. She was not born here as I was you know, father."

"Well, Amy, well. I don't quite follow you, but it's natural I suppose that Fanny should prefer to be outside, and even that you often should, too. So, you and Fanny and your uncle, my dear, shall have your own way. Good, good. I'll not meddle; don't mind me."

To get her brother out of the prison; out of the low work of running errands for the prisoners outside, and out of the bad company into which he had fallen, was her hardest task. At eighteen years of age her brother Edward would have dragged on from hand to mouth, from hour to hour, from penny to penny, until eighty. Nobody got into the prison from whom he gained anything useful or good, and she could find no patron for him but her old friend and godfather, the turnkey.

"Dear Bob," said she, "what is to become of poor Tip?" His name was Edward, and Ted had been changed into Tip, within the walls.

The turnkey had strong opinions of his own as to what would become of poor Tip, and had even gone so far with the view of preventing their fulfilment, as to talk to Tip in urging him to run away and serve his country as a soldier. But Tip had thanked him, and said he didn't seem to care for his country.

"Well, my dear," said the turnkey, "something ought to be done with him. Suppose I try and get him into the law?"

"That would be so good of you, Bob!"

The turnkey now began to speak to the lawyers as they passed in and out of the prison. He spoke so perseveringly that a stool and twelve shillings a week were at last found for Tip in the office of a lawyer at Clifford's Inn, in the Palace Court.

Tip idled in Clifford's Inn for six months, and at the end of that term sauntered back one evening with his hands in his pockets, and remarked to his sister that he was not going back again.

"Not going back again?" said the poor little anxious Child of the Marshalsea, always calculating and planning for Tip, in the front rank of her charges.

"I am so tired of it," said Tip, "that I have cut it."

Tip tired of everything. With intervals of Marshalsea lounging, and errand-running, his small second mother, aided by her trusty friend, got him into a warehouse, into a market garden, into the hop trade, into the law again, into an auctioneer's, into a brewery, into a stockbroker's, into the law again, into a coach office, into a wagon office, into the law again, into a general dealer's, into a distillery, into the law again, into a wool house, into a dry goods house, into the fish-market, into the foreign fruit trade, and into the docks. But whatever Tip went into he came out of tired, announcing that he had cut it. Wherever he went, this useless Tip appeared to take the prison walls with him, and to set them up in such trade or calling; and to prowls about within their narrow limits in the old slipshod, purposeless, down-at-heel way; until the real immovable Marshalsea walls asserted their power over him and brought him back.

Nevertheless, the brave little creature did so fix her heart on her brother's rescue that, while he was ringing out these doleful changes, she pinched and scraped enough together to ship him for Canada. When he was tired of nothing to do, and disposed in its turn to cut even that, he graciously consented to go to Canada. And there was grief in her bosom over parting with him, and joy in the hope of his being put in a straight course at last.

"God bless you, dear Tip. Don't be too proud to come and see us, when you have made your fortune."

"All right!" said Tip, and went.

But not all the way to Canada; in fact, not further than Liverpool. After making the voyage to that port from London, he found himself so strongly impelled to cut the vessel, that he resolved to walk back again. Carrying out which intention, he presented himself before her at the expiration of a month, in rags, without shoes, and much more tired than ever.

At length, after another period of running errands, he found a pursuit for himself, and announced it.

"Amy, I have got a situation."

"Have you really and truly, Tip?"

"All right. I shall do now. You needn't look anxious about me any more, old girl."

"What is it, Tip?"

"Why, you know Slingo by sight?"

"Not the man they call the dealer?"

"That's the chap. He'll be out on Monday, and he's going to give me a berth."

"What is he a dealer in, Tip?"

"Horses. All right! I shall do now, Amy."

She lost sight of him for months afterwards, and only heard from him once. A whisper passed among the elder prisoners that he had been seen at a mock auction in Moorfields, pretending to buy plated articles for real silver, and paying for them with the greatest liberality in bank-notes; but it never reached her ears. One evening she was alone at work – standing up at the window, to save the twilight lingering above the wall – when he opened the door and walked in.

She kissed and welcomed him; but was afraid to ask him any question. He saw how anxious and timid she was, and appeared sorry.

"I am afraid, Amy, you'll be vexed this time. Upon my life I am!"

"I am very sorry to hear you say so, Tip. Have you come back?"

"Why – yes."

"Not expecting this time that what you had found would answer very well, I am less surprised and sorry than I might have been, Tip."

"Ah! But that's not the worst of it."

"Not the worst of it?"

"Don't look so startled. No, Amy, not the worst of it. I have come back, you see; but —*don't* look so startled – I have come back in what I may call a new way. I am off the volunteer list altogether. I am in now, as one of the regulars. I'm here in prison for debt, like everybody else."

"Oh! Don't say that you are a prisoner, Tip! Don't, don't!"

"Well, I don't want to say it," he returned in unwilling tone; "but if you can't understand me without my saying it, what am I to do? I am in for forty pound odd."

For the first time in all those years, she sunk under her cares. She cried, with her clasped hands lifted above her head, that it would kill their father if he ever knew it; and fell down at Tip's worthless feet.

It was easier for Tip to bring her to her senses than for her to bring *him* to understand that the Father of the Marshalsea would be beside himself if he knew the truth. Tip thought that there was nothing strange in being there a prisoner, but he agreed that his father should not be told about it. There were plenty of reasons that could be given for his return; it was accounted for to the father in the usual way; and the collegians, with a better understanding of the kind fraud than Tip, stood by it faithfully.

This was the life, and this the history, of the Child of the Marshalsea, at twenty-two. With a still abiding interest in the one miserable yard and block of houses as her birthplace and home, she passed to and fro in it shrinking now, with a womanly consciousness that she was pointed out to everyone. Since she had begun to work beyond the walls, she had found it necessary to hide where she lived, and to come and go secretly as she could, between the free city and the iron gates, outside of which she had never slept in her life. Her original timidity had grown with this concealment, and her light step and her little figure shunned the thronged streets while they passed along them.

Worldly wise in hard and poor necessities, she was innocent in all things else. Innocent, in the mist through which she saw her father, and the prison, and the dark living river that flowed through it and flowed on.

This was the life, and this the history, of Little Dorrit, until the son of a lady, Mrs. Clennam, to whose house Amy went to do needlework, became interested in the pale, patient little creature. He followed her to her home one day and when he found that it was the debtor's prison, he walked

in. Learning her sad history from her father, Arthur Clennam resolved to do his best to try to get him released and to help them all.

One day when he was walking home with Amy to try to find out the names of some of the people her father owed money to, a voice was heard calling, "Little mother, little mother," and a strange figure came bouncing up to them and fell down, scattering her basketful of potatoes on the ground. "Oh Maggie," said Amy, "what a clumsy child you are!"

She was about eight and twenty, with large bones, large features, large hands and feet, large eyes, and no hair. Amy told Mr. Clennam that Maggie was the granddaughter of her old nurse, who had been dead a long time, and that her grandmother had been very unkind to her and beat her.

"When Maggie was ten years old she had a fever, and she has never grown older since."

"Ten years old," said Maggie. "But what a nice hospital! So comfortable, wasn't it? Such a 'e'v'nly place! Such beds there is there! Such lemonades! Such oranges! Such delicious broth and wine! Such chicking! Oh, ain't it a delightful place to stop at!"

"Poor Maggie thought that a hospital was the nicest place in all the world, because she had never seen another home as good. For years and years she looked back to the hospital as a sort of heaven on earth."

"Then when she came out, her grandmother did not know what to do with her, and was very unkind. But after some time Maggie tried to improve, and was very attentive and industrious and now she can earn her own living entirely, sir!"

Amy did not say who had taken pains to teach and encourage the poor half-witted creature, but Mr. Clennam guessed from the name "little mother" and the fondness of the poor creature for Amy.

One cold, wet evening, Amy and Maggie went to Mr. Clennam's house to thank him for having freed Edward from the prison, and on coming out found it was too late to get home, as the gate was locked. They tried to get in at Maggie's lodgings, but, though they knocked twice, the people were asleep. As Amy did not wish to disturb them, they wandered about all night, sometimes sitting at the gate of the prison, Maggie shivering and whimpering.

"It will soon be over, dear," said patient Amy.

"Oh, it's all very well for you, mother," said Maggie, "but I'm a poor thing, only ten years old."

Thanks to Mr. Clennam, a great change took place in the fortunes of the family, and not long after this wretched night it was discovered that Mr. Dorrit was owner of a large property, and they became very rich.

But Little Dorrit never forgot, as, sad to say, the rest of the family did, the friends who had been kind to them in their poverty; and when, in his turn, Mr. Clennam became a prisoner in the Marshalsea, Little Dorrit came to comfort and console him, and after many changes of fortune she became his wife, and they lived happy ever after.



## V. THE TOY-MAKER AND HIS BLIND DAUGHTER

CALEB PLUMMER and his blind daughter lived alone in a little cracked nutshell of a house. They were toy-makers, and their house, which was so small that it might have been knocked to pieces with a hammer, and carried away in a cart, was stuck like a toadstool on to the premises of Messrs. Gruff & Tackleton, the toy merchants for whom they worked – the latter of whom was himself both Gruff and Tackleton in one.

I am saying that Caleb and his blind daughter lived here. I should say Caleb did, while his daughter lived in an enchanted palace, which her father's love had created for her. She did not know that the ceilings were cracked, the plaster tumbling down, and the woodwork rotten; that everything was old and ugly and poverty-stricken about her, and that her father was a gray-haired, stooping old man, and the master for whom they worked a hard and brutal taskmaster; oh, dear no, she fancied a pretty, cosy, compact little home full of tokens of a kind master's care, a smart, brisk, gallant-looking father, and a handsome and noble-looking toy merchant who was an angel of goodness.

This was all Caleb's doing. When his blind daughter was a baby he had determined, in his great love and pity for her, that her loss of sight should be turned into a blessing, and her life as happy as he could make it. And she was happy; everything about her she saw with her father's eyes, in the rainbow-colored light with which it was his care and pleasure to invest it.

Caleb and his daughter were at work together in their usual working-room, which served them for their ordinary living-room as well; and a strange place it was. There were houses in it, finished and unfinished, for dolls of all stations in life. Tenement houses for dolls of moderate means; kitchens and single apartments for dolls of the lower classes; capital town residences for dolls of high estate. Some of these establishments were already furnished with a view to the needs of dolls of little money; others could be fitted on the most expensive scale, at a moment's notice, from whole shelves of chairs and tables, sofas, bedsteads, and upholstery. The nobility and gentry and public in general, for whose use these doll-houses were planned, lay, here and there, in baskets, staring straight up at the ceiling; but in showing their degrees in society, and keeping them in their own stations (which is found to be exceedingly difficult in real life), the makers of these dolls had far improved on nature, for they, not resting on such marks as satin, cotton-print, and bits of rag, had made differences which allowed of no mistake. Thus, the doll-lady of high rank had wax limbs of perfect shape; but only she and those of her grade; the next grade in the social scale being made of leather; and the next coarse linen stuff. As to the common-people, they had just so many matches out of tinder-boxes for their arms and legs, and there they were – established in their place at once, beyond the possibility of getting out of it.

There were various other samples of his handicraft besides dolls in Caleb Plummer's room. There were Noah's Arks, in which the birds and beasts were an uncommonly tight fit, I assure you; though they could be crammed in, anyhow, at the roof, and rattled and shaken into the smallest compass. Most of these Noah's Arks had knockers on the doors; perhaps not exactly suitable to an Ark as suggestive of morning callers and a postman, yet a pleasant finish to the outside of the building. There were scores of melancholy little carts, which, when the wheels went round, performed most doleful music. Many small fiddles, drums, and other instruments of torture; no end of cannon, shields, swords, spears, and guns. There were little tumblers in red breeches, incessantly swarming up high obstacles of red-tape, and coming down, head first, upon the other side; and there were innumerable old gentlemen of respectable, even venerable, appearance, flying like crazy people over pegs, inserted, for the purpose, in their own street-doors. There were beasts of all sorts,

horses, in particular, of every breed, from the spotted barrel on four pegs, with a small tippet for a mane, to the fine rocking horse on his highest mettle.

"You were out in the rain last night in your beautiful new overcoat," said Bertha.

"Yes, in my beautiful new overcoat," answered Caleb, glancing to where a roughly-made garment of sackcloth was hung up to dry.

"How glad I am you bought it, father."

"And of such a tailor! quite a fashionable tailor; a bright blue cloth, with bright buttons; it's a deal too good a coat for me."

"Too good!" cried the blind girl, stopping to laugh and clap her hands – "as if anything was too good for my handsome father, with his smiling face, and black hair, and his straight figure, as if *any* thing could be too good for my handsome father!"

"I'm half ashamed to wear it, though," said Caleb, watching the effect of what he said upon her brightening face; "upon my word. When I hear the boys and people say behind me: 'Halloa! Here's a swell!' I don't know which way to look. And when the beggar wouldn't go away last night; and, when I said I was a very common man, said 'No, your honor! Bless your honor, don't say that!' I was quite ashamed. I really felt as if I hadn't a right to wear it."

Happy blind girl! How merry she was in her joy!

"I see you, father," she said, clasping her hands, "as plainly as if I had the eyes I never want when you are with me. A blue coat!" —

"Bright blue," said Caleb.

"Yes, yes! Bright blue!" exclaimed the girl, turning up her radiant face; "the color I can just remember in the blessed sky! You told me it was blue before! A bright blue coat – "

"Made loose to the figure," suggested Caleb.

"Yes! loose to the figure!" cried the blind girl, laughing heartily; "and in it you, dear father, with your merry eye, your smiling face, your free step, and your dark hair; looking so young and handsome!"

"Halloa! Halloa!" said Caleb. "I shall be vain presently."

"I think you are already," cried the blind girl, pointing at him, in her glee. "I know you, father! Ha, ha, ha! I've found you out, you see!"

How different the picture in her mind from Caleb, as he sat observing her! She had spoken of his free step. She was right in that. For years and years he never once had crossed that threshold at his own slow pace, but with a footfall made ready for her ear, and never had he, when his heart was heaviest, forgotten the light tread that was to render hers so cheerful and courageous.

"There we are," said Caleb, falling back a pace or two to form the better judgment of his work; "as near the real thing as sixpen'orth of halfpence is to sixpence. What a pity that the whole front of the house opens at once! If there was only a staircase in it now, and regular doors to the rooms to go in at! but that's the worst of my calling. I'm always fooling myself, and cheating myself."

"You are speaking quite softly. You are not tired, father?"

"Tired," echoed Caleb, with a great burst in his manner, "what should tire me, Bertha? *I* was never tired. What does it mean?"

To give the greater force to his words, he stopped himself in an imitation of two small stretching and yawning figures on the mantel-shelf, who were shown as in one eternal state of weariness from the waist upwards; and hummed a bit of a song. It was a drinking song, something about a sparkling bowl; and he sang it with an air of a devil-may-care voice, that made his face a thousand times more meager and more thoughtful than ever.

"What! you're singing, are you?" said Tackleton, the toy-seller for whom he worked, putting his head in at the door. "Go it! *I* can't sing."

Nobody would have thought that Tackleton *could* sing. He hadn't what is generally termed a singing face, by any means.

"I can't afford to sing," said Tackleton. "I'm glad you can. I hope you can afford to work, too. Hardly time for both, I should think?"

"If you could only see him, Bertha, how he's winking at me!" whispered Caleb. "Such a man to joke! you'd think, if you didn't know him, he was in earnest, wouldn't you, now?"

The blind girl smiled and nodded.

"I am thanking you for the little tree, the beautiful little tree," replied Bertha, bringing forward a tiny rose-tree in blossom, which, by an innocent story, Caleb had made her believe was her master's gift, though he himself had gone without a meal or two to buy it.

"The bird that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing, they say," grumbled Tackleton. "What about the owl that can't sing, and oughtn't to sing, and will sing; is there anything that he should be made to do?"

"The extent to which he's winking at this moment!" whispered Caleb to his daughter. "Oh, my gracious!"

"Always merry and light-hearted with us!" cried the smiling Bertha.

"Oh! you're there, are you?" answered Tackleton. "Poor idiot!"

He really did believe she was an idiot; and he founded the belief, I can't say whether consciously or not, upon her being fond of him.

"Well! and being there – how are you?" said Tackleton, in his cross way.

"Oh! well; quite well. And as happy as even you can wish me to be. As happy as you would make the whole world, if you could!"

"Poor idiot!" muttered Tackleton. "No gleam of reason! Not a gleam!"

The blind girl took his hand and kissed it; held it for a moment in her own two hands; and laid her cheek against it tenderly, before releasing it. There was such unspeakable affection and such fervent gratitude in the act, that Tackleton himself was moved to say, in a milder growl than usual:

"What's the matter now?"

"Bertha!" said Tackleton, assuming, for once, a little cordiality. "Come here."

"Oh! I can come straight to you. You needn't guide me," she rejoined.

"Shall I tell you a secret, Bertha?"

"If you will!" she answered, eagerly.

How bright the darkened face! How adorned with light the listening head!

"This is the day on which little what's-her-name, the spoilt child, Peerybingle's wife, pays her regular visit to you – makes her ridiculous picnic here; ain't it?" said Tackleton, with a strong expression of distaste for the whole concern.

"Yes," replied Bertha. "This is the day."

"I thought so!" said Tackleton. "I should like to join the party."

"Do you hear that, father!" cried the blind girl in delight.

"Yes, yes, I hear it," murmured Caleb, with the fixed look of a sleep-walker "but I do not believe it. It's one of my lies, I've no doubt."

"You see I – I want to bring the Peerybingles a little more into company with May Fielding," said Tackleton. "I am going to be married to May."

"Married!" cried the blind girl, starting from him.

"She's such a confounded idiot," muttered Tackleton, "that I was afraid she'd never understand me. Yes, Bertha! Married! Church, parson, clerk, glass-coach, bells, breakfast, bride-cake, favors, marrow-bones, cleavers, and all the rest of the tomfoolery. A wedding, you know; a wedding. Don't you know what a wedding is?"

"I know," replied the blind girl, in a gentle tone. "I understand!"

"Do you?" muttered Tackleton. "It's more than I expected. Well, on that account I want you to join the party, and to bring May and her mother. I'll send a little something or other, before the afternoon. A cold leg of mutton, or some comfortable trifle of that sort. You'll expect me?"

"Yes," she answered.

She had drooped her head, and turned away; and so stood, with her hands crossed, musing.

"I don't think you will," muttered Tackleton, looking at her; "for you seem to have forgotten all about it already. Caleb!"

"I may venture to say, I'm here, I suppose," thought Caleb. "Sir!"

"Take care she don't forget what I've been saying to her."

"*She* never forgets," returned Caleb. "It's one of the few things she ain't clever in."

"Every man thinks his own geese swans," observed the toy merchant, with a shrug. "Poor devil!"

Having delivered himself of which remark with infinite contempt, old Gruff & Tackleton withdrew.

Bertha remained where he had left her, lost in meditation. The gaiety had vanished from her downcast face, and it was very sad. Three or four times she shook her head, as if bewailing some remembrance or some loss; but her sorrowful reflections found no vent in words.

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