

Do Not Forget

Mr Meagles came to see Arthur at nine o'clock one morning.

'I've talked to Doyce about his business,' he said cheerfully. 'He's delighted that you're interested in it, and wants you to know everything about it. He's gone out of town for a week, so that you can go through his books and papers freely. Then, you can decide if you want to become his partner.'

They went to Bleeding-Heart Yard that same morning, and Arthur began to look at Doyce's papers. It was clear that Doyce needed help in the office, but everything was clearly arranged and carefully noted down, and after three or four days, Arthur had learned everything he needed to know. He was able to discuss with Mr Meagles how much he should pay for half the business - and found that Doyce had suggested an even smaller figure. And so, when the engineer came back to town, they were able to quickly agree to become business partners.

'If I had looked high and low, Mr Clennam, I don't believe I would have found a better business partner,' said Doyce.

'And I say the same!' said Arthur.

So Arthur began his new life, working at Bleeding-Heart Yard - and within two months, he knew everything about the running of Doyce's business. Raising his eyes one day, he looked out of the glass front of his office, down at the yard. He was surprised to see a short, dark man going quickly from house to house, talking loudly. Then the man came across to Doyce's factory and climbed the stairs to Arthur's office, puffing and blowing like a little engine.

'My name's Pancks,' he said, with his hat pushed back on his ears. His black eyes were sharp and he was biting the fingers of his right hand. 'I collect the weekly rents from Bleeding-Heart Yard for Mr Casby. May I come in?'

Arthur nodded, and Mr Pancks took his hat off and came across the room.

'Mr Clennam,' he began, 'I want information, sir.'

'About this business?' asked Arthur.

'No,' said Pancks, 'about Dorrit.'

'This is a strange visit, Mr Pancks. It's extraordinary that you should come to me,' said Arthur, looking carefully at Pancks's face. It was dirty, but eager and quick.

'I've met a young lady sewing at Mr Casby's house. I believe that she also does some work for your mother.' Pancks paused to bite his fingers again. 'I have heard the name Dorrit before, and I want to find out about her family. I think I might be able to help them. I can't say any more than that for now.'

After a little thought, Arthur decided to tell Pancks about the Father of the Marshalsea and the long years he had spent in prison because he could not pay his debts. He told Pancks about his attempts to help Mr Dorrit, and about the Barnacles at the Circumlocution Office.

'Now, since I have told you as much as I know, could I please ask that you tell me anything you learn about the Dorrit family?' asked Arthur.

Pancks agreed. He stood a little while, looking at Arthur, biting his fingers, and obviously fixing in his mind everything he had been told. 'Now I must go. I have a few more rents to collect in the yard today.'

Little Dorrit had finished a long day's work in Mrs Clennam's room and was putting away all her sewing, neat and tidy, before going home. Pancks had been visiting, and Mrs Clennam watched Little Dorrit and then said, slowly and thoughtfully, 'What do you know about that man, Little Dorrit?'

'I don't know anything about him, madam,' she said. 'Only that I have seen him here a few times, and at Mr Casby's house, and he has spoken to me.'

'Why does he come here to see you?' Mrs Clennam asked.

'I don't know, madam,' said Little Dorrit.

Little Dorrit got up to go, but as she stopped by Mrs Clennam's chair to say good night, Mrs Clennam put out her hand and laid it on her arm. 'Tell me, Little Dorrit,' she said. 'Have you many friends?'

'Very few, madam.'

'I believe I was your friend when you had no other. Is that right?'

'Yes, madam. Many times, without the work you gave me, we would have had nothing,' said Little Dorrit.

'Has it been very difficult for you?' asked Mrs Clennam. She picked up her husband's watch, which always lay on her table, and turned it over and over in her hands, deep in thought.

'Sometimes it has been hard to live,' said Little Dorrit in her soft voice, 'but I think not harder than many people find it.'

'Well said!' replied Mrs Clennam quickly. 'You are a good, thoughtful girl.'

Affery had come into the room at that moment, and she was astonished to see Mrs Clennam put her hands on Little Dorrit's shoulders and gently kiss her on the forehead, with a gentleness which Affery had not thought Mrs Clennam could show.

'Now go, Little Dorrit,' said Mrs Clennam, 'or you will be late, poor child.'

Affery followed Little Dorrit downstairs to let her out, and stepped outside the open door. It was a rainy, thundery evening, and she watched the

clouds flying fast across the sky. Affery was afraid of storms, but she also hated the house and its strange darkness, so she did not hurry back inside. She was deciding whether to go in or stay out when a violent rush of wind blew the door closed, shutting her out.

'What shall I do now?' cried Affery. 'Mrs Clennam's all alone inside, and can't come down to open it.'

She pulled her apron over her head to keep the rain off, and ran crying around in front of the house. She was bending down to look through the keyhole when she suddenly heard someone behind her. She screamed, and looked around. A tall man was standing there. He was dressed like a traveller, wearing a thick, long cloak, and a tall hat. He had a long nose and a black moustache. He laughed at Affery's sudden cry, and as he laughed, his moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache.

'Why are you frightened?' he said.

'The wind has blown the door shut and I can't get in!' cried Affery.

'Hah! Indeed!' said the gentleman. 'Do you know the name of Clennam around here?'

'Of course I do!' cried Affery. 'She's here in this house! And she's all alone in her room, and can't walk. And my husband's out, and can't help. What can I do now?'

The gentleman stood back and looked at the house. His eyes rested on the long, narrow window near the door. 'Now, madam, shall I open the door for you?'

'Yes, please, and do it at once,' cried Affery. 'She may be calling me at this very moment. And I'm going out of my mind thinking of it.'

'I'll make a suggestion, then. I've just arrived on the boat from France.' He showed Affery his cloak and his boots, which were very wet, and Affery noticed that he was shaking with cold. 'I wanted to see Mrs Clennam within

office hours, but I am late because of the bad weather. I'll open the door, if you will make sure Mrs Clennam will see me tonight.'

Affery was glad to agree to this suggestion, and the gentleman took off his cloak and gave it to Affery. He ran to the house and jumped up, and in a minute, he had opened the window and climbed in. He had strange and frightening eyes, and Affery suddenly thought that if he went straight upstairs to murder Mrs Clennam, she could not prevent him. But after a moment, he appeared at the front door.

'Now, my dear madam,' the stranger said, as he took back his cloak. 'If you could... What ever is that noise?'

It was the strangest of sounds. A tremble, and a low, heavy noise, then the sound of something light falling.

'I don't know what it is,' said Affery fearfully, 'but I've heard it many times.'

The man's trembling lips had turned colourless as he listened, but at that moment, he and Affery heard a voice from behind them, and turned to see Mr Flintwinch arriving back at the house.

'What's happening here, Affery?' said the old man.

'My name is Rigaud,' said the visitor, 'and I need to see Mrs Clennam.'

'Mrs Clennam is my business partner,' Mr Flintwinch said. 'Come into my office.' He lit a candle and led the way, in his sideways manner, across the hall to his office.

'Have you not heard about me from Paris?' asked the visitor.

'We have heard nothing from Paris about a Mr Rigaud,' said Mr Flintwinch.

Rigaud took a letter from his pocket and gave it to Mr Flintwinch. It was an official letter, from a trusted agent in Paris, which asked Mrs Clennam to pay Rigaud fifty pounds.

'Very good, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch. The man's air of confidence had already made him decide that he was a true gentleman.

'I should like to see Mrs Clennam tonight for a few minutes,' said Rigaud, his moustache going up and his nose coming down in that most terrible of smiles.

Affery took the letter upstairs to Mrs Clennam, and Mr Flintwinch lit two more candles while Rigaud waited. Then he took the visitor up to Mrs Clennam's room.

'I apologize for visiting you so late at night,' said Rigaud.

'You are English, sir?' asked Mrs Clennam.

'No, no. I have no country. I have travelled in many countries, here, there, and everywhere!' the visitor said.

Mr Flintwinch made tea, and Mr Rigaud, in his most gentlemanly manner, got up and took a cup to Mrs Clennam. As he put the cup on her table, he noticed the watch lying in front of her as it always did.

'Excuse me for noticing it, but that's a very beautiful watch. May I?' he said, taking it in his hand. 'A gentleman's watch. I have often seen these in Holland and Belgium. Now, are these the letters D.N.F? They are difficult to read.'

'Those are the letters,' said Mrs Clennam.

'D.N.F. was some lovely, interesting creature, I'm sure,' said Mr Rigaud.

'The letters are not the first letters of any name,' said Mrs Clennam, coldly. 'They stand, I believe, for Do Not Forget!'

'And naturally,' said Mr Rigaud, putting the watch back on the table and sitting down again, 'you do not forget.'

'No, sir, I do not forget,' replied Mrs Clennam in her strong, deliberate voice. 'One does not forget, living a life as dull as mine has been these years. I neither forget nor wish to forget.'

She put her hand on the watch and moved it to the exact place on her little table where it always sat. Mr Rigaud listened to her, thoughtfully touching his moustache.

'Mr Flintwinch will give you your fifty pounds tomorrow. I hope your stay in this city will be pleasant,' said Mrs Clennam, with her frozen smile.

Mr Rigaud stood up to say goodbye, and followed Mr Flintwinch out of the room. He looked in all the rooms with interest, as he walked through the house.

'I love an old house,' he said, putting his long cloak on. He stopped to look at a painting on the wall. 'Who is this, Mr Flintwinch?'

'Mr Clennam. Her husband, now dead.'

'The owner of the watch?'

'Yes, Mr Rigaud.'

'They must have been very happy.'

'I can't say. I don't know,' said Mr Flintwinch. 'There are secrets in all families.'

'Secrets? So there are! You are right,' cried Mr Rigaud. And he threw back his head and burst into laughter.

'You will collect your money tomorrow, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch, politely.

'My dear sir!' Rigaud took Mr Flintwinch by the collar with both hands. 'I will collect my money, you have the word of a gentleman. You shall see me again!'