

LITTLE DORRIT

by Charles Dickens



THE AUTHOR

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was the second of eight children in a family plagued by debt. When he was twelve, his father was thrown into debtors' prison (the very Marshalsea prison described in *Little Dorrit*), and Charles was forced to quit school and work in a shoe-dye factory. These early experiences gave him a sympathy for the poor and downtrodden, along with an acute sense of social justice. At the age of fifteen, he became a clerk in a law firm, and later worked as a newspaper reporter. He published his first fiction in 1836 - a series of character sketches called *Sketches by Boz*. The work was well-received, but its reception was nothing compared to the international acclaim he received with the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* the next year.

After this early blush of success, Dickens took on the job as editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a literary magazine in which a number of his early works were serialized, including *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9). He left to begin his own literary magazine, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, in 1840, and over the next ten years published many of his most famous novels in serial form, including *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1), *A Christmas Carol* (1844), and *David Copperfield* (1849-50), perhaps the most autobiographical of all his novels. Other works were serialized in *Household Words* between 1850 and 1859, including *Bleak House* (1852-3), which was then succeeded by *All the Year Round*, which he edited until his death in 1870, publishing such novels as *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-1), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5). A workaholic to the end, Dickens died of a stroke in 1870 after having penned a chapter of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, his final (and unfinished) novel, the previous day.

As far as his personal life was concerned, Dickens was a tireless writer and speaker, but his own personal insecurities made him very difficult to live with. He married Catherine Hogarth in 1836 and, though they had ten children together, their relationship grew increasingly strained until they finally divorced in 1859. He traveled extensively, including making several trips to America (he never much liked the country or its people), and was frequently called upon to read from his own writings, drawing large and enthusiastic crowds. Dickens also spoke out on a variety of social issues, including American slavery and the lack of copyright laws that made it far too easy for unscrupulous people to steal his writings, as well as the abuses of industrial society that play such a prominent role in his novels.

Little Dorrit (1855-7) is a satire on the follies of the British government, largely embodied in descriptions of the Marshalsea debtors' prison, where Dickens' father had been incarcerated, and the Circumlocution Office (representing the Treasury Department), which is totally preoccupied with "how not to do it." Note also that the meteoric rise and fall of Mr. Merdle reflects an actual case, that of John Sadleir, a member of Parliament who swindled many investors through fraud, forgery, and mismanagement, then took his own life with a bottle of prussic acid (Sadleir also served as the model for Melmotte in Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*). Like other later Dickens novels, *Little Dorrit* has not always fared well at the hands of the critics, though it sold more during its serialization than any other book he had written to that point. Critics point to its convoluted and highly-unlikely plot that strains the suspension of disbelief and its use of far too many fortuitous coincidences. Nonetheless, the social criticism is pungent, and Amy Dorrit is a plucky, admirable heroine who can easily take her place among the most memorable of the nineteenth century.

PLOT SUMMARY

BOOK ONE

The story begins on a hot day in Marseilles. In a cell of the local prison we find two men, M. Rigaud, a con man, and John Baptist Cavalletto, a common smuggler. Rigaud had been arrested on a charge of murder; he had married a young, beautiful, and rich woman who had proved unwilling to part with her money for his benefit. They often quarreled, and he had been known to abuse her. One day, as they were walking atop a cliff, another quarrel broke out; she flew at him, and in the fray fell from the cliff and died. Soon the guards arrive to take Rigaud to his trial before the President of the fortress.

In another part of Marseilles, an English couple, with their daughter and her servant, are preparing to be released from quarantine in which they had been placed to ensure that they were not carriers of the plague. They are now to be allowed to return to England - Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, their daughter Pet, and Tattycoram, a young dark-haired woman they had taken from an orphanage (her real name, or at least the one given her in the institution, is Harriet Beadle). Their companion in quarantine is one Arthur Clennam, who was forced by his parents to live in Egypt, and is only now returning following the death of his father. His parents were strict religious folk who sheltered him from the affairs of the world and sought to preserve their material possessions, and he now has no idea what to do with his life. At breakfast before their departure, they meet a solitary young woman named Miss Wade, who is extremely self-assured and confident. When Miss Wade leaves Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, she encounters Tattycoram, who is in a rage against her employers, who care nothing for her and treat her as if she were nothing, but after Miss Wade calms her, she admits that, when she is not in one of her fits of anger, she is well content with the treatment she receives at the hands of her benefactors.

A few days later, Arthur Clennam has arrived in London and is sitting in a coffee house on a Sunday morning. His strict religious upbringing has made him loathe the Sabbath, which he sadly regrets. After sitting in the café all day, he finally decides to go home. There he is greeted by Jeremiah, the old family servant, who escorts him to his mother's room. Nothing there has changed in fifteen years; it is dark and dismal, and Mrs. Clennam rarely leaves it, especially since the death of her husband, with whom she never got along. Both servant and mistress give Arthur

a chilly welcome. As they converse awkwardly, their eyes fall on the late Mr. Clennam's gold watch, which he had asked Arthur to send home to England to his mother when he died. After Affery, the maid, brings her paltry repast, she energetically reads one of the Imprecatory Psalms, then dismisses Arthur so she can go to bed. Downstairs, Affery offers him some food, but Arthur declines; she then tells him not to be intimidated by his mother, but to stand up to her. Jeremiah warns Arthur that he is facing the wrath of his mother on the morrow because of his determination to leave the family business. When Affery takes Arthur to the small attic bedroom, she tells him of her marriage to Jeremiah - he and Mrs. Clennam simply informed her that it was to take place, with no courtship involved. He asks her about a young woman who had been hidden in the shadows of his mother's bedroom, and is told that she is Little Dorrit, one of his mother's "projects." Affery also tells him that his former sweetheart, for whom he continues to carry a torch, is now a prosperous widow.

That night, Affery has what she thinks is an unusually realistic dream. She wakes to find her husband gone, and after creeping downstairs, finds him in the parlor with another man. They are drinking the old lady's port together. The other man then takes an iron strongbox and leaves the house. When Jeremiah returns, he stumbles into Affery, shakes her and threatens her, and tells her that she was walking in her sleep.

The next morning, after Jeremiah wheels Mrs. Clennam to her desk so she can conduct her daily business, Arthur comes in and informs her that he has no desire to continue working in the family firm. At the age of forty, he has never gone against his mother's wishes, has given twenty years to the business, and consequently has no life of his own. Before he leaves, he asks his mother a mysterious question - he wants to know if his father had ever done a wrong to someone that he regretted and wished to make right. Mrs. Clennam, furious at the mere thought that they had done harm to someone for which they should make amends, threatens to disinherit and renounce Arthur if he dares to bring up such a subject ever again in her presence. She calls for Jeremiah and tells him that from now on he will help her run the business, at which word his eyes light up with the glow of avarice. When Mrs. Clennam rings for lunch, it is brought in by the same young woman who had been in the room the day before, Little Dorrit, who works twelve hours a day as a seamstress for Arthur's mother. Unable to stand the depressing atmosphere any longer, Arthur tells Jeremiah that he will move back into the coffee house where he had been the day before his arrival at his mother's home. He returns each day to sort out his father's remaining affairs, and becomes increasingly curious about Little Dorrit. Who is she, and where does she come from?

Twenty years before the story began, an effete man had been incarcerated in the Marshalsea Prison for debt as the result of an investment gone bad. He brought with him his wife and two young children. A third child, a girl named Amy, was born in the prison, and eight years later his wife died. Over time, the man became known as the Father of the Marshalsea because he was its longest-tenured inhabitant. He received small offerings as marks of esteem from visitors and temporary inmates, and his children became well-known among the prisoners. Bob, the turnkey of the Marshalsea, was chosen as godfather to the girl born in the prison, and as she grew, he became her dearest friend. He bought her a small chair and allowed her to sit by the fire in his cell, and took her on excursions on Sunday afternoons to see the fields beyond the prison walls. Her older brother and sister became every bit as irresponsible as her father, so she, at a very young age, became the *de facto* head of the family. She sought among the inmates for any who might be of help to them, arranging for dancing lessons for her sister (she does so well that

she becomes a dancer in her own right) and convincing a temporarily-incarcerated seamstress to teach her needlework. Meanwhile, her father, in a perpetual state of depression, forced her to hide her labors so he could maintain the fiction of gentility. When her sister Fanny went to live with her uncle, an impoverished musician, in order to further her dancing career, the young girl, known to all as Little Dorrit because of her diminutive stature, is forced to tell her father that Fanny must move out in order to serve as companion to her uncle. Amy was at a loss, however, as to how to help her lazy brother Tip, who by then was eighteen and showed no signs of pursuing an occupation of any kind. She finally convinced Bob to arrange a place for him as a law clerk, but Tip tired of the job and quit after six months. Amy then arranged for a long succession of occupations for Tip, all of which ended in the same way. Finally she scraped together enough of her own earnings as a seamstress to send him to Canada to make his fortune, but he went no further than Liverpool, fell in with a dishonest horse trader, and soon found himself back in the Marshalsea, this time as an inmate. Thus Amy Dorrit, by the age of twenty-two, is the sole support of her family, but has never known life outside the debtors' prison. It is at this stage of her life that the shy young girl is first observed by Arthur Clennam when he visits his mother, for whom she is doing needlework.

When Arthur follows Amy from his mother's, he sees her go into a dark enclosure, and asks a passerby the nature of the building. When he is told it is the Marshalsea debtors' prison, he asks if he may gain admission, and soon finds that the old man to whom he speaks is none other than Frederick Dorrit, Amy's uncle, who invites him into the prison. Arthur is admitted to William Dorrit's cell, where he finds that Amy is preparing for him the food that Mrs. Clennam had given her for her dinner, while she takes nothing for herself. Dorrit launches into a long explanation of the noble visitors who have been presented to him, and embarrasses Amy by mentioning that they frequently give him monetary testimonials. Soon Fanny and Tip arrive, demanding the clothes that they had left with Amy for washing and mending. When the bell rings for visitors to leave, Arthur slips a few coins to Amy's father, then speaks to her privately, assuring her of his desire to be a friend to her and her family. By the time he finishes his conversation, the door is locked, and he is forced to spend the night in the prison tavern. As he falls into a restless sleep, he wonders if his mother's kindness to Amy may be because she in some way was responsible for her father's fall.

When Arthur wakes in the morning, he takes time to examine his surroundings and finds them filled with poverty, despair, and hopelessness. Unable to find Amy, he leaves a note for her to meet him at her uncle's boarding house. When she arrives, they go for a walk. He tries to find from her if she had ever heard of his family prior to being summoned to work for his mother, but she knows of no previous contact. She thanks him effusively for his generosity to her father, but tries to prevent him from thinking ill of one who has lived in difficult straits for so long. When Arthur presses her to find out to whom her father is indebted, she knows little, naming only one Mr. Tite Barnacle of the Circumlocution Office, but warns him that any efforts on her father's behalf are unlikely to be beneficial, since he is really better off as the object of respect in the Marshalsea than as a helpless old man on the outside. Arthur then suggests that perhaps Tip at least might be liberated. On their way back to the prison, they encounter a mentally handicapped woman named Maggy, and Arthur soon realizes that this poor woman, who calls Amy "Little Mother," is another of those poor souls who have benefitted from Little Dorrit's simple charity.

When Arthur goes to the Circumlocution Office in search of Mr. Tite Barnacle to discover information about Mr. Dorrit's indebtedness, the son of the great man informs Arthur that his

father has the gout, and may be found at home. Barnacle refuses to tell him anything, insisting that he must go through proper channels and fill out the requisite forms. Arthur then returns to the Circumlocution Office determined to press his case. He is sent from one office to the next, from one official to the next, and is given no satisfaction. As he leaves the building, he encounters Mr. Meagles, his former shipmate. Meagles is infuriated, and in his frustration has collared a man named Daniel Doyce. As Meagles describes the case to Arthur, he discovers that Doyce is an inventor who devised something of great value a dozen years earlier. When he submitted his invention to the government, however, he was treated as an annoyance at best and a malefactor at worst, with the result that the people of England never gained the benefit of the invention.

Meanwhile, in France, Rigaud has been acquitted of the murder of his wife for lack of evidence and has made his way to the town of Chalons, where he meets his old prison companion Cavalletto. Rigaud now calls himself Lagnier, and proposes that the two team up to make their fortunes. Cavalletto, however, wants nothing to do with the old reprobate and sneaks out of the inn at the crack of dawn, fleeing as fast as his legs will carry him.

Meagles and Doyce lead Arthur to Bleeding Heart Yard, a London slum in which Doyce's factory is located. There Arthur seeks out a man named Plornish, an unemployed plasterer who had been the means of Amy finding employment with Mrs. Clennam. As Arthur questions him, he discovers that he had done nothing more than give Amy's address and employment request to Casby, their landlord, through whom Arthur's mother had made the connection. Arthur then asks Plornish to serve as the intermediary in his effort to arrange for Tip's release from the Marshalsea, which Plornish is quite willing to do. Acting thus to prevent Amy from knowing her family's benefactor, Arthur then insists that Plornish let him know if there is any other way he may be of service to the Dorrits in general, and Amy in particular.

The mention of Mr. Casby strikes a chord in Arthur's memory, since Flora Casby, his daughter, had been the love of Arthur's youth. He thus has two motives to seek to renew acquaintances with Christopher Casby, who is Mr. Tite Barnacle's town agent. Casby has nothing of use to offer concerning Little Dorrit, and Arthur soon concludes that the man is nothing but a fraud who gets by in life by virtue of his imposing appearance (everyone calls him the Patriarch because of his long hair hanging beneath a bald pate). Casby offers to introduce Arthur to his widowed daughter, Flora, but the encounter crushes any hopes the latter may have entertained. His former love is now a fat, spoiled, empty-headed, silly chatterbox. Arthur cannot avoid a dinner invitation, and finds himself seated with Casby, Flora, Mr. Pancks, the rent-collector who in fact runs the business, using Casby as a mere figurehead, and the crotchety aunt of Mr. Finching, Flora's late husband, who had left her in the care of his widow. After dinner, Flora tries to arrange another meeting, but Arthur has no intention of pursuing any such thing. On the way home, he encounters a crowd carrying a man, recently arrived from Marseilles, who has been run over by a mail coach (we later discover that this is none other than Cavalletto). He sees him safely to the hospital, where the compound fracture in his leg is repaired. At home at last, he thinks of the emptiness of his life and realizes that the only redeeming light that remains is Little Dorrit.

As Arthur thinks on these things, who should appear at his door but Amy herself, along with Maggy! The midnight visit turns out to be for three purposes – to express her gratitude for whoever might have been responsible for the release of Tip from prison, to ask Arthur's advice about revealing her story to his mother (she fears that Flintwinch has been following her, but Arthur advises her to do and say nothing), and to beg him never to give money to her father again

in order to spare him the humiliation that she alone feels. He offers her food and drink which she refuses, but which Maggy gratefully accepts, then offers to see her home. Because the prison is locked at night, she tells him she will be sleeping with Maggy, and begs him not to accompany her when he offers to do so. Nonetheless, he follows her until they near the Marshalsea, but leaves without realizing that Maggy has no place to sleep, and that the two young women will be walking the streets until morning. They dodge the homeless, drunkards, thieves, and worse, and finally stumble into a church, where they spend the last hour before daylight. This dreary night was the “party” to which Amy had told her father she had been invited at the home of Mrs. Clennam.

One night Mrs. Flintwinch overhears a conversation between her husband and Mrs. Clennam. The old retainer speaks to his mistress as an equal partner, and insists that he will not allow her to throw the blame for past injustices on her weakling husband, Arthur’s father. He wonders whether his employer intends to do anything for the Dorrit family other than keeping Amy as her seamstress, and Mrs. Clennam says she does not; she even refuses to hear where the family lives, or under what circumstances. Mrs. Flintwinch doesn’t know how to respond to the encounter, but is certain she needs to keep her knowledge secret from the clever ones in the household.

As Arthur walks along the road to Twickenham to see Mr. Meagles, he ponders the large questions of his life – his occupation, his fortune (or lack thereof), his relationship with his mother, and of course Little Dorrit and how he might smooth the path of one he views privately as his adopted daughter. On his journey he encounters Daniel Doyce. As they talk, Arthur becomes more and more impressed by the inventor, his cheerfulness in the face of frustration and disappointment and his fertile mind and skill with his hands, and is sorry to hear that Doyce has no partner to manage the business end of his workshop. When they arrive at the Meagles home, they are greeted by the family and shown around a house decorated with the treasures accumulated in travels around the world. Arthur is again taken with Pet’s beauty and begins to muse about the possibility of courting her, but decides that he would not be a suitable match for her. At dinner, Tattycoram’s resentment of her place in the household becomes evident; Meagles must twice exhort her to count to twenty-five in order to avoid losing her temper. Later, Arthur seeks Mr. Meagles’ advice about becoming the business partner Daniel Doyce so desperately needs, and Meagles encourages him to pursue the matter.

One morning Arthur takes a walk, and on arriving at the ferry observes a tall man and a dog; something about the man’s demeanor marks him as cruel to Arthur’s mind. Later, when Arthur arrives at the Meagles home, he is surprised to find the same man in attendance there. The man introduces himself as Henry Gowan. Arthur, despite his resolution not to pursue Pet, feels pangs of jealousy and instantly dislikes him. He quickly learns from Doyce that Gowan is a ne’er-do-well, a sower of wild oats who has done nothing with his life other than dabble in painting. He is also a suitor to Miss Minnie, who seems to like him, much to the consternation of her parents. That evening, Gowan brings with him to dinner none other than Clarence Barnacle of the Circumlocution Office, who remembers Arthur with no great pleasure. Needless to say, the evening is an unpleasant one for almost all concerned.

Quite in contrast to Pet Meagles, we next find that Little Dorrit also has a suitor – John Chivery, the son of the turnkey, who moons over her from afar. He has loved Amy from childhood, and has graduated from playing with her in the prison courtyard to writing her poetry and giving cigars to her father. He hopes to inherit his father’s post as turnkey and to make Amy

his wife – an ambition encouraged by his parents. She bears no affection for him, however, and when he approaches her to try to propose one Sunday afternoon, she stops him before he can say anything and begs him never to speak to her again other than as a friend. He is heartbroken, but consents, and leaves Amy standing on the Iron Bridge, weeping in despair, as she had been before John found her.

That evening William Dorrit is visited in the Marshalsea by his brother Frederick, and all remark at the contrast between the two – the incarcerated William is noble of bearing and perfectly at ease, while poor Frederick is shabby and weighted down with cares. When Frederick leaves, Chivery the turnkey is uncharacteristically abrupt with the two brothers. Dorrit, fearful of losing the status and privileges he enjoys so much, that night warns Amy to lead on John Chivery rather than rejecting him. She hears his words with sadness and dismay, but takes her duty to her father very seriously. He then pours out his grief and shame in a torrent of self-pity, and she comforts him. He quickly recovers enough to remind her that one in his position ought not walk around with a coat out at the elbows and worn-out shoes, and graciously gives her permission to buy new ones for him when she has accumulated sufficient funds.

Tip, having obtained his liberty, spent his money on flashy clothes and is now employed in a billiard parlor. He continues to take his meals at the Marshalsea (at Amy's expense, of course). One day Amy goes to the theater to find her sister Fanny. She notices that Fanny wears a gaudy bracelet and asks her its origin. Fanny then takes her to one Mrs. Merdle, a wealthy woman whose dissolute son had taken a fancy to Fanny. Fanny, typical of her family, haughtily refused him as beneath her dignity, and a delighted Mrs. Merdle, who had been prepared to bribe her with the bracelet, haughtily gave it to her as a gift instead. Amy goes away feeling humiliated, but Fanny is pleased with having extracted some form of payment from the old battleaxe. After they leave, Fanny accuses Amy of lacking in pride and refusing to stand up for the dignity of her family.

In the next chapter we learn a bit about the Merdle family. Mr. Merdle is very wealthy and influential, a financier and member of Parliament, one who seeks to cultivate society but never seems to enjoy it and rarely has anything to say. Mrs. Merdle, his second wife, seems to have been acquired for purely decorative purposes, and her son Sparkler is a fool who spends most of his time courting absurdly unsuitable females like Fanny Dorrit. Merdle thinks himself ill, but his physician can find no cause for his complaint.

As Arthur Clennam continues to visit the Dorrits in the Marshalsea, William Dorrit begins to find him offensive because he neglects to leave a testimonial when he visits (this being done at Little Dorrit's request, of course). One day Chivery asks Arthur to pay a visit to his wife in the family tobacconist shop on business concerning Little Dorrit. Mrs. Chivery, knowing that Arthur has influence with the Dorrit family, explains to him that her son John has fallen into a state of deep depression ever since Amy rejected his attempted proposal, and asks Arthur to intercede on John's behalf. He, acknowledging the truth of her description of Amy's father and siblings while doubting that she would be suitable match for John Chivery, promises only that he will do all he can to advance Amy's happiness. On the way home, he encounters Little Dorrit walking on the Iron Bridge. Soon Maggy appears, bearing letters for Arthur from William Dorrit and Tip. Both asked for money, and Arthur granted the request of the father and refused that of the son. Amy, horrified that her father would engage in such shameful behavior the moment she leaves his presence, hurries immediately back to the prison, while Arthur ponders the possibility of someday being more to Amy than her adopted father and protector.

Meanwhile, Meagles has successfully interceded with Daniel Doyce concerning Arthur joining him in his business venture. Arthur spends the next week examining the books and determines to buy into the business as a full partner. Within two months the firm of Doyce and Clennam is doing very well indeed. One day Arthur is visited in his counting house by Flora Finching and her late husband's aunt. They offer congratulations on his new business venture, though Flora clearly continues to entertain hopes for a renewal of their relationship. She then expresses the desire of her parents to employ Little Dorrit as a seamstress, for which Arthur is very grateful. Soon Mr. Casby, her father, appears with Pancks in tow. They too offer their congratulations, then depart. When Arthur is alone, Pancks returns and seeks information about the Dorrit family. After assuring Arthur that his intentions are good, Arthur tells him all he knows, which is admittedly not much, then asks Pancks to pass on to him any information he may glean in his inquiries, to which he agrees. After asking Arthur about the "lame foreigner with a stick" (Cavalletto) who had sought to rent a room and receiving Arthur's recommendation, Pancks spend the rest of the day going through Bleeding Heart Yard seeking to collect rents, often with limited success.

That evening Plornish visits Little Dorrit to convey Flora's offer of employment. When she goes to see Flora the next morning, Flora talks her ear off, mostly concerning her relationship to Arthur Clennam, and leaves Amy with the distinct impression that their love lingers still in spite of all that has passed. At dinner, Amy meets Mr. Casby and Pancks, and is uncomfortable in such a genteel setting. After dinner Flora takes to her bottle while Amy returns to her stitching. Soon Pancks slips into the room and makes it known that he knows much of Amy and her family, warns her to give little heed to Flora, and assures her that a better future awaits her than she might hope. He then warns her to take no notice of him in public. In the days that follow, Amy sees Pancks everywhere, though he rarely gives her so much as a glance. These strange doings drive Amy to her room more frequently, and when Arthur appears at the Marshalsea one day, she refuses to see him, using a headache as an excuse. He offers to send for a doctor, but she declines. She then tells Maggy a story about a tiny young woman who dies of unrequited love.

Meanwhile, Pancks begins to cultivate young John Chivery. One day he invites him to dinner and introduces him to his landlord, a debt collector named Rugg, and his daughter Anastatia, who also suffers the pangs of unrequited love, having recently sued a local baker who had backed out of an engagement for breach of promise. After dinner, Pancks pulls out his notebook and writes bits of detective work on pieces of paper, which he then distributes to himself, Rugg, and John. All apparently have to do with the mystery surrounding Amy Dorrit. John's eagerness to help one who has rejected him appears to Anastatia to be ludicrous, but she admires his integrity nonetheless. Pancks also begins to take an interest in John Baptist Cavalletto, who has moved into Bleeding Heart Yard. Though he speaks little English, he has begun to find favor with the denizens of the Yard, and Arthur Clennam has sent enough work his way for him to support himself in simple fashion.

Arthur continues to struggle with his firm resolution not to fall in love with Pet Meagles. He avoids their home in Twickenham when Henry Gowan is there whenever possible, but Doyce's frequent visits make conversation about the family unavoidable. Neither man approves of Gowan, who continues to court Pet; her father also finds the relationship troubling. Despite his dislike for the man, Gowan invites Arthur to come to dinner one day to meet his mother, and, seeing no way out of it, Arthur accepts. When he arrives, he is subjected to aristocratic blather from a retired diplomat and his wife, which he finds completely odious. Later Mrs. Gowan asks him for his

opinion of “Henry’s flame,” Pet Meagles. He praises Pet’s beauty, and refuses to comment on her family’s social standing, which appears to be a matter of great concern to Mrs. Gowan. She obviously considers her son the black sheep of the family because he dabbles in art and has spent his time slumming among the plebeian population. She believes that Henry is being pursued by the Meagles clan for his money, and is resigned to him following his foolish fancies. Arthur seeks to correct her misconception by assuring her that Mr. Meagles, far from seeking an alliance with her family, is doing everything possible to discourage the match. She thereupon ends the interview, convinced that the sly Meagles family is attempting to snare Henry by appearing to oppose him.

Meanwhile, Arthur continues to ponder the reason why Pancks should seek information about the Dorrit family even as he maintains his firm desire to right any past wrong that may have been committed by his family against them. He rarely sees Amy anymore, and finds that he misses her greatly. One day Arthur finds Meagles in a dither – Pet’s companion Tattycoram has fled their household. The high-spirited girl, despite being encouraged repeatedly by Meagles to count to twenty-five before doing anything rash, has gotten fed up with all the drama surrounding Pet’s flirtation with Gowan and has run away. Before leaving, she had spewed all the venom kept inside for years about being treated as an inferior, however kindly, by the members of the family. Meagles, desirous of giving the passionate thing another chance, asks Arthur’s advice, and he suggests contacting Miss Wade, with whom Tattycoram had struck up a friendship. The two go to search for her, and after several hours find her in a building that appears to be abandoned. Tattycoram is indeed with her, and utterly refuses to return to the Meagles residence – a determination in which Miss Wade clearly supports her. Meagles and Arthur both warn Tattycoram against submitting herself to the influence of such a bitter woman, but she again refuses to leave. Follow-up letters are returned to sender, and when Arthur pays another visit to the shabby building, he finds that Miss Wade and Tattycoram have departed, leaving no trace of their whereabouts. When Meagles puts an advertisement in the paper offering to forget and forgive if “a certain person” returns, he is surprised to find that waifs of all descriptions appear at his door, though Tattycoram is not among them, and that he is inundated with requests for money by solicitors of all sorts.

One day Arthur visits Twickenham, and while walking near the Meagles home encounters Pet. She has sought him out to tell him that she is engaged to marry Henry Gowan, and to beg him to look after her parents in her absence, and to try to reconcile her father to her choice of husband. He agrees to do all that she asks, and returns to the family having cast off forever any hopes he entertained with regard to Pet Meagles.

Mrs. Clennam and Flintwinch have been receiving an unusual number of visitors. Mrs. Flintwinch deduces that they are engaged in some sort of moneymaking venture. At the same time, Pancks appears with greater frequency and gives special attention to Little Dorrit. Mrs. Clennam, too, astounds Mrs. Flintwinch by her kindness to Amy, to the extent of asking after her family and giving her a kiss on the forehead. One day Mrs. Flintwinch is locked out of the house during a windstorm, and a stranger appears asking admission to the house. He climbs in a window and unlocks the door while Mrs. Flintwinch goes to find her husband. Flintwinch invites the stranger into his study, and the man produces a letter of reference that introduces him as one Blandois, from Paris, though he is none other than the scoundrel Rigaud, whom we last encountered after a term in prison. He passes himself off as a gentleman and citizen of the world and begs Flintwinch to obtain lodgings for him at a local tavern.

Blandois returns to the Clennam residence and is received by Mrs. Clennam. He takes an immediate interest in the old watch she keeps always by her side. He finds the initial D.N.F. worked into the watch lining, and is told they stand for "Do Not Forget." Mrs. Clennam orders Flintwinch to accommodate Blandois, and the latter surprisingly asks for a tour of the old house. He seems especially fascinated by a portrait of Arthur's late father. He then invites Flintwinch back to the tavern for a drink, but fails in his attempt to get the old man drunk. Blandois assures Flintwinch that they will meet again and become close acquaintances, but the next day he pays his bill and returns to the Continent.

John Nandy, the father of Mrs. Plornish, is a failed musician who has retired to a workhouse, having nowhere else to go. He is occasionally released to visit his daughter and her family, and has over time gained the friendship of Mr. Dorrit in the Marshalsea, who considers him a sort of retainer and pities his low estate. Though Thomas Plornish has often invited him to live with them, he steadfastly refuses to impose upon their hospitality. One day when Little Dorrit visits the Plornish family, she offers to take Nandy to see her father. On the way, they meet Fanny, who rebukes Amy for walking in public with a pauper and thus disgracing the family. Much to her consternation, her father reacts the same way, though not with the same harshness. At that moment John Chivery enters with a letter from Arthur, containing a banknote and announcing his intention of visiting that afternoon. Dorrit then invites Nandy up to the room and orders tea prepared for then when Arthur arrives. After Nandy exits the premises, Tip arrives in high dudgeon because Arthur had refused his request for funds. Dorrit demands that his son be silent, and soon Tip and Fanny leave with noses high in the air to express their disdain for Clennam and all he represents. When Dorrit is called to attend business elsewhere in the prison, Arthur finally achieves his goal of being alone with Amy. When Arthur sits down with Amy, he assures her that she should think nothing of the harsh words of her siblings aimed in his direction. She perceives that he is troubled, and he shares with her that he thought himself in love, but has gotten over it now, and in fact has concluded that he is too old for love, not knowing the pain he is inflicting in her heart by saying so and having no idea how much she has grown to love him. He begs her to come to see him more often, and assures her that he will do anything he can to advance her interest, particularly should she find some young man her own age to whom she is attracted. At that moment Pancks and Rugg burst into the room, demanding Arthur's prompt attention to a discovery they have made.

Despite her protestations to the contrary, Mrs. Gowan quickly decides to give her consent to Henry's marriage to Pet Meagles, largely for pecuniary reasons, though she maintains a public fiction of grieving over the marriage. One day she visits her friend Mrs. Merdle to seek her approval for her decision concerning Henry's marriage. Mrs. Merdle, though she deplors the idea of someone in Society marrying someone who is not, does admit that for a young man to make his fortune by doing so would be a permissible exception. When Mr. Merdle enters, she turns upon him a torrent of withering criticism because he has no interest in Society, despite the fact that his fortune helps to fund its activities. In fact, she considers his role as a man of business to be scandalous.

As the wedding of Pet Meagles and Henry Gowan approaches, Mrs. Gowan busies herself with sending out invitations to as many of her relations as possible while Mr. Meagles is occupied with ferreting out and paying off the numerous debts of his future son-in-law. Arthur, being often thrown together with Gowan, finds more than ever that he is a lazy good-for-nothing who has no intention of pursuing any worthwhile labor, even his art, and thinks that the world owes him a

living. He thus bitterly regrets having promised to cast Gowan in the most positive light before his friend Meagles. The marriage nonetheless takes place, much to the sorrow of Pet's father and her devoted friend Arthur Clennam.

Shortly after the wedding, Pancks reveals to Arthur the results of his detective work. He had discovered that William Dorrit is, unknown to himself, the heir to a large estate, and therefore a rich man who need not spend one more day in the Marshalsea. Arthur immediately goes to Flora's home to tell Little Dorrit, who faints away upon hearing the good news. After she comes to her senses, they hurry off to the Marshalsea. When Dorrit absorbs the startling news, he swears that Pancks will be repaid in full for his efforts, and that all who had given him small offerings over the years should be repaid as well. His children would no longer have to work, and he and his family would depart the prison in a carriage in the sight of all his fellow inmates. In the intervening days, Dorrit treats all around him with harshness and arrogance, though he distributes small monetary favors to the other prisoners, while Fanny and Tip begin spending money in anticipation of their impending good fortune. In the confusion of the day of departure, when all are celebrating, Amy goes to her father's old room to change her dress and faints dead away. Arthur finds her and carries her to the carriage, and watches as the family drives away to their new life.

BOOK TWO

The second half of the novel begins at the Convent of St. Bernard in the Swiss Alps. Among the guests we find the entire Dorrit contingent - William and his brother Frederick, Tip, Fanny, and Amy, along with Mrs. General, a martinet of a widow hired by Dorrit as a companion to his daughters. Henry Gowan and his wife Pet are there as well, along with Rigaud, going by the name of Blandois, whom Amy instinctively mistrusts. Each person acts in character in their interactions at dinner, and Amy takes the time to tend to Pet, who had taken a fall from a mule on the way up the mountain. When she does so, she gives Pet a letter from Arthur Clennam in which he praises Amy as a dear friend who may be a great comfort when such is wanted. Fanny and Tip scorn Amy for acting like a servant rather than a lady, and proceed to ridicule Arthur as a connection with a past that they would rather forget. Their father concurs, agreeing that they should have nothing to do with Mr. Clennam in the future.

When they arrive at the bottom of the mountain, they find one of their rooms occupied by two travelers who sought to use it for a brief supper. Dorrit is furious at this affront to the dignity of his family, and Tip and Fanny soon join in the round of excoriations. The travelers, who are none other than Mrs. Merdle and her son Edmund Sparkler, apologize profusely, and all is made well. In the meanwhile, however, Sparkler and Fanny eye one another sufficiently to develop a sense of mutual interest. For Amy, the Grand Tour through Europe, leading them to a long stay in a palace in Venice, is an unbelievable dream. She looks at everything around them, with its indescribable beauty, but to her the only reality continues to be the Marshalsea. She finds herself often alone by choice, unable even to serve her father in the simple ways to which she had become accustomed lest some observer might think her less than a great lady. She takes time to write to Arthur, informing him that Pet is, in her words, "very well and very happy," though Amy suspects otherwise and finds Gowan an unsuitable match. She shares her doubts and fears with Arthur, grieves at her lack of closeness with her father, and begs him always to remember her as the poor little girl he sheltered and pitied in London.

After some months in Venice, Dorrit begins to worry about Amy because she shows no interest in the society to which they are trying to accommodate themselves. He seeks the advice of Mrs. General, who affirms that, while Fanny has force of character, Amy is sadly lacking in that quality. Amy loves the sights of Venice, on which all cultured Englishmen will naturally look down, but hates to spend time in society, to which cultured Englishmen naturally drawn. Mrs. General advises Dorrit to speak to Amy about the matter, so he summons her forthwith. When she arrives, her father tells her he is disappointed with her and embarrassed by her lack of interest in the finer life of society. She promises to try to do better, but generously recognizes that his arrogance and airs are nothing more than a reaction against the damage done by a quarter of a century behind prison walls. After Mrs. General departs, he rebukes Amy for constantly, by her behavior if not by her words, reminding him of a past that he dearly wants to forget, and insists that she should learn to act like a lady for his sake as well as her own. She suppresses her own pain in order to comfort him, and says nothing in defense of herself.

Soon Tip and Fanny stumble down to breakfast. Both have been out most of the night, Fanny partying and Tip gambling. Frederick, no longer needing to play his clarinet for a living, now spends his time in art galleries, to which Amy sometimes accompanies him. On this particular morning, he mentions having seen Henry Gowan and Pet in one of the galleries, and Amy expresses a desire to pay Pet a visit. Mrs. General is about to veto the idea because the Gowans are not sufficiently high in society until Tip mentions that the Gowans are connected to the famous Mrs. Merdle; this is enough for Mrs. General, and therefore enough for Mr. Dorrit, and the visit is approved. Tip also hints at the attraction Sparkler, Mrs. Merdle's son, has developed for Fanny. After Mrs. General and Amy leave the table, Frederick, whose mind works exceedingly slowly, bursts out with the most violent objection at the treatment to which Amy has been subjected, accusing the rest of the family of rank ingratitude toward their greatest benefactor. Fanny promptly bursts into tears, then cries out against her uncle for accusing her so unjustly. Her father says nothing aside from begging her to forgive Frederick because of his obvious infirmities of mind.

After all the commotion subsides, Fanny insists on going with Amy to visit Minnie Gowan, though Amy would have much preferred to go alone. Pet is not being treated well by her husband, who constantly deprecates her in order to show his independence from the daughter of the man who had paid off his debts, while spending as much time as possible in the company of the disreputable Blandois. When they arrive, Fanny makes small talk to such an extent that Amy is barely able to get a word in edgewise. Then Pet takes the sisters into Henry's studio, where he is painting a portrait of Blandois. After Henry's dog Lion almost attacks Blandois and Henry kicks and beats him furiously, the women leave, with Amy having accomplished her purpose only to the degree of having exchanged meaningful glances with Pet. As they travel home in their gondola, Sparkler approaches in one of his own, and Fanny immediately begins flirting with him. Sparkler follows them home and is promptly invited to dinner and to the opera. Fanny encourages his infatuation with all her energy, though he is bored to tears at the opera by her empty chatter. As they leave to return home, they encounter Blandois, who informs them that Gowan has been greatly saddened by the loss of his dog Lion, who was found poisoned that very afternoon. Mr. Dorrit, meanwhile, has decided to have Gowan paint his portrait.

Mrs. General continues subjecting Amy to her tutelage, much to the dismay of the latter, though she bears it with great patience. One day Fanny takes Amy aside and informs her that Mrs. General appears to have designs on their father. Neither sister relishes such a development;

Fanny even goes so far as to say that she would marry Sparkler just to get out of the house should such an eventuality come to pass. Gowan, meanwhile, arranges to paint Dorrit's picture when they all sojourn in Rome. This gains Gowan and Pet an invitation to dine with the Dorrits. Amy still is unable to find an opportunity for a private conversation with Pet until shortly before they are to depart from Rome, when Pet manages to whisper her assurance that Blandois, whom they both despise and fear, was responsible for poisoning Lion. In Rome, they continue on the dreary round of tourism and dinner invitations, with everyone doing what is expected and no one engaging in any real thought or conversation, with the result that Amy is impressed with the great likeness between the inmates of the Marshalsea and the community of British expatriates in Europe. At Rome they meet Mrs. Merdle; she and Fanny fence verbally, and Mr. Dorrit speaks of his great desire to make the acquaintance of her financier husband in order to seek advice about the use of his fortune.

Meanwhile, back in London, the firm of Doyce and Clennam is going along swimmingly. Arthur has brought the business end of the firm into good order, while Daniel continues to apply his ingenuity to the business of making a profit. He is still troubled, however, with his failure to produce the earlier invention that had become so much bogged down in the Circumlocution Office twenty years before. Arthur, knowing the depth of his friend's disappointment, persuades him to let him give it one more try, to which Daniel grudgingly agrees. Arthur then plunges into a life of endless paperwork, punctuated only by visits to his mother and Mr. Meagles, but he is constantly sensible of the degree to which he misses his dear friend Little Dorrit. He knows that her family resents him because of his associations with their former life, and he comes to think of Amy as one with whom he can never again be intimate, and ponders her future - marriage, family, etc., with a detachment that would break her heart should she know the direction of his thought. He thinks of himself as an elderly man for whom any hope of romance has long passed.

One day Henry Gowan's mother visits Mr. and Mrs. Meagles while Arthur is with them. She is condescending as usual, speaking of her "poor boy" as if he had been outmaneuvered by the scheming family of his wife. Meagles observes that Henry has consistently outspent his income, and when Mrs. Gowan informs them that Pet is pregnant, the implication is that Meagles is expected to proffer further financial assistance, since it is obviously too much to expect Henry to support a child as well as a wife. Meagles has as much as he can handle to keep from exploding at her but manages to keep his temper, though he clearly states his opposition to the marriage from the beginning. Mrs. Gowan continues to portray him as a low schemer, and the two decide that they should have no further intercourse with one another, to the great satisfaction of both.

Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, with Arthur's encouragement, decide to go to Rome to see Pet, both to help her in her pregnancy and to bail Henry Gowan out of his latest financial difficulties. While they are gone, Arthur often walks around their grounds, and one day the housekeeper comes out to speak to him, informing him that she had recently seen the long-missing Tattycoram peering in the gate. Arthur thinks she was imagining things, but shortly thereafter he sees her in London in the company of some unknown man. He decides to follow her. The two soon meet a woman whom Arthur recognizes immediately as Miss Wade, who unceremoniously dismisses the man. Arthur continues to follow the women, and is astounded when their path takes them to the home of Mr. Casby. He follows them in, and is escorted into the company of Flora. After far too much mindless chatter, he convinces Flora to take him down to see her father, but by that time Tattycoram and Miss Wade have left. Arthur seeks information on the pretext that Tattycoram had left the care of his friends the Meagleses, but Casby professes not to know Miss Wade's

address. After Arthur leaves, however, Pancks follows him and tells him that Miss Wade knows nothing of her parents, but that Casby manages a small trust for her, from which she periodically draws, and may know more about her than she knows herself. He warns Arthur that she is an angry, bitter, and vengeful young woman - an observation that matches Arthur's own impressions.

After many fruitless days in the Circumlocution Office, Arthur decides to visit his mother, though he dreads the confrontation. As he approaches the house, he sees a man before him; he is none other than the man he had seen in the presence of Tattycoram and Miss Wade. He follows him into the house and discovers that the man is our old friend Blandois (a.k.a. Rigaud), who is now enmeshed in some deviltry with Flintwinch. Mrs. Clennam invites both of them upstairs, and they make no attempt to hide the animosity between them. When Flintwinch arrives, Mrs. Clennam dismisses Arthur, who leaves with great reluctance for his mother's sake, while Blandois threatens him on his way out the door.

Soon Arthur receives a letter from Amy Dorrit. Most of it is taken up with a description of the living conditions of Henry and Minnie Gowan. They live in a shabby apartment in Rome, and Pet is very lonely. Amy spends time with her whenever she can, but Henry ignores her completely, and is unable to devote his attention to anything for very long, even his painting. Pet has just had a baby boy, but Henry still spends most of his time traveling in society, with which he professes to be completely bored. Fanny, meanwhile, is still being pursued by Edmund Sparkler, though Amy disapproves of the relationship. Amy, though she marvels at all they have seen in their European tour, is homesick for England, for the Marshalsea, and for Arthur Clennam.

Back in London, Mr. Merdle is giving a dinner party for the rich and powerful, which Dickens describes with stinging satire and at great length. Significant aspects of the conversation include the fact that Merdle, at the repeated urging of his wife, intends to obtain a place in the Circumlocution Office for his stepson Sparkler. In addition, the Barnacle clan complains at length about the trouble they were required to take when Dorrit had paid off his debt; it took them six months to figure out what to do with the money and how to give a receipt for it. All in all, they would have preferred that Dorrit remain in prison rather than causing them all that paperwork. The strange thing about Mr. Merdle, the host, however, was the fact that he had never really accomplished anything at all aside from being rumored to be fabulously wealthy. His name is on everyone's tongue, from the stockbrokers to the struggling laborers in Bleeding Heart Yard, who have invested their paltry savings in one of Merdle's concerns.

In the Yard, Pancks is having his usual trouble collecting rents, though everyone agrees that they would pay up readily if they were as rich as Mr. Merdle. Mrs. Plornish's store is doing a brisk business, though her neighbors are much readier to give her their custom than they are to pay their bills. Cavalletto, who is boarding with the Plornishes, one day appears frightened, and tells his friends that he has seen someone he had hoped never to see again (Blandois, of course), but refuses to speak of the matter. Soon Arthur comes in, and shares with his eager hearers the letter he had received from Little Dorrit. He then invites Pancks home for dinner and shares with him his concern about the evil influences gathering around his mother. Pancks has little to tell him other than advising him to seize the opportunity of investing with Merdle, since no such sure thing had presented itself to men seeking to advance their fortunes in years. Arthur, however, remains suspicious and determines to be cautious.

Sparkler's new appointment soon draws the attention of the British contingent in Rome, most of whom think it to be the greatest piece of idiocy in the world. Fanny, who is constantly

drawn into the limelight due to her connections with the young man, is uncertain whether to dismiss him or marry him. She asks Amy for advice. Amy begs Fanny not to marry Sparkler, both because she doesn't love him and because he is a fool. Fanny, however, is tempted by his money, his social position, and the opportunity to get revenge on Mrs. Merdle, who constantly looks down on her. Within six weeks, the two are engaged, and soon have gained the consent of their parents. When William Dorrit insists on announcing the engagement to Mrs. General, Fanny is appalled, realizing that the old battleaxe is worming her way into her father's affections far too effectively. Fanny soon completely dominates Edmund, though she has not yet declared open warfare on her mother-in-law to be.

When Edmund is called to London in the spring to begin his duties, Fanny wonders whether to marry him in Italy before he leaves or later in London. She seeks Amy's advice, and her sister suggests that waiting might be more prudent. Fanny, however, has already made up her mind to marry as soon as possible. She also warns Amy to do everything possible to oppose strenuously the designs of Mrs. General on their father. The wedding comes to pass in the height of opulence, though Little Dorrit remains quietly in the background through it all. Afterwards, her father takes her aside and tells her that it is his wish that she, too, should marry well. She begs him never to send her away, but he expresses reluctance to sacrifice her on the altar of his selfish desires [the speech drips with irony!]. Amy, having no desire to marry, is heartbroken, fully realizing that her father simply wants her out of the way so he can bring another wife into his life.

When the newlyweds arrive in London, they stay in the home of Mr. Merdle until their own home is ready to be occupied. Mr. Dorrit accompanies them, and Mr. Merdle soon pays a call on him. After some meaningless small talk, Dorrit ventures to ask Merdle for advice about investing his money. Merdle agrees to assist him, and Dorrit soon finds himself invited into all the best homes in London; Merdle has become his entryway into high society.

Shortly before leaving London, Mr. Dorrit receives a visit from Flora Finching, whose name he does not recognize. When she introduces herself as having previously employed Amy as a dressmaker, he is appalled, wanting no reminders of his past life. After much confusing verbiage, Flora succeeds in stating her purpose - she carries a wanted poster indicating that the police seek a certain Blandois, who was known to travel in good company in Italy as well as in London, and had been seen in the home of Mrs. Clennam. She seeks Dorrit's help, should Blandois be in seen in Italy, to return him to London in order to give account of himself. Dorrit agrees to assist her, largely to get her out of the house, but his concern for Henry Gowan's welfare leads him to pay a visit to Mrs. Clennam that evening. She, too, has seen the handbill, but is willing to share no information with Dorrit. A sudden noise frightens Miss Affery, but Flintwinch as usual insists that she has been dreaming, and Dorrit returns to the hotel filled with apprehension.

The next day he considers paying a visit to the Marshalsea, but decides against it, fearing that anyone would make a connection between him and the dreadful place. That evening, however, he is accosted in his hotel by none other than John Chivery. Dorrit invites him in, then rages at him for the insult represented by his mere presence. John, who expected a warm greeting from an old friend, is startled and confused, especially since he had only come to ask after the family and convey his greetings to Amy. Dorrit realizes that he has behaved badly, and soon apologizes to John, asking after his family. He then accepts the gift of cigars that John has brought, and entrusts him with a "testimonial" of a hundred pounds for the prisoners in the

Marshalsea. Before leaving for Italy, Dorrit gives the cigars to his driver. On the way, he stops in Paris and purchases a necklace, earrings, brooches, and rings, intending to give them as love gifts and matrimonial gifts to someone when he returns to Rome.

When he arrives, it is his intention to propose marriage to Mrs. General, but all observe that he is failing fast, in both mind and body. His tentative attempts to speak to his intended go nowhere, and at a farewell dinner hosted by Mrs. Merdle, he suddenly begins to speak as if he is in the Marshalsea again. The guests excuse themselves as quickly as possible in the face of such embarrassing behavior, and Amy manages to get him back home safely. In the days that follow, he knows nothing but the Marshalsea and his life there, imagining himself still to be in prison. Ten days later, he dies, Little Dorrit having tended him as of old. Frederick, unable to imagine life without his brother, soon joins him in death.

Acting on information he received from Pancks, Arthur crosses the channel to Calais, where he seeks out Miss Wade, hoping to gain knowledge of the whereabouts of Blandois, who had clearly been involved in some chicanery related to his mother's business. She receives him with great anger and bitterness and tells him little except that she had hired him to carry out certain tasks for her. Harriet Beadle (formerly Tattycoram) then appears, and the two quarrel over the fact that Harriet had gone behind Miss Wade's back to visit the Meagles home while they were gone. Arthur, realizing that both women were angry at the world and had been making one another miserable, takes his leave, but on the way out Miss Wade gives him a document in which she has narrated her history.

She was an orphan, and from an early age had hated all who were kind to her, imputing evil motives to them in their loving treatment. Whether the person was the old woman who cared for her as a child or the instructor who taught her, or the families for whom she served as a governess, all were seen as patronizing and hiding their condescension behind a mask of kindness and concern. In one home for which she served as governess to a girl of fifteen, she became engaged to the girl's cousin. The plan was for them to get married and live in India. She was convinced, however, that her intended had chosen her merely for her looks, and insisted that he keep his distance from her in the family circle. He soon began to spend more time with his cousin than with her. Soon a friend of the family entered the picture, none other than Henry Gowan. In him she found a kindred spirit - one who cared for no one and saw through everyone. She began to spend more and more time with him, much to the annoyance of her fiancé and the suspicion of his mother. When she was confronted by the mother for her "unhappy temper," she stormed out and swore she never wanted to see any of them again. Gowan followed her, and the two commiserated with one another, then parted to seek their own paths in life. Soon she heard that Gowan was engaged to Pet Meagles, of whom she became jealous and hated with unquenchable bitterness. Her curiosity got the better of her, however, and she had to see the girl; it was then that she encountered Tattycoram, found in her one who was miserable in like fashion, and secured her escape. The two had lived together in poverty ever since.

Back in Bleeding Heart Yard, Daniel Doyce has been offered employment by a foreign government, and jumps at the opportunity, leaving Arthur in charge of the business. He pleads with Arthur to drop the pursuit of his patent in the Circumlocution Office, but Arthur refuses to give up on the possibility of helping his friend. After Doyce leaves, Arthur continues to mull over the mysterious Blandois. Soon Cavalletto enters, sees the police handbill, and tells Arthur that he knows the man, describing the circumstances of their acquaintance. He tells Arthur that the man is an assassin, which causes him to worry even more for his mother and the presence of the

man in her home. He convinces Cavalletto to seek out any knowledge of the man he is able to find, especially with regard to his present whereabouts.

Arthur's concern for his mother leads him to visit her home, despite his certainty that she will refuse to reveal anything to him about her connection with Blandois; his alternative plan is to see if he can get any information from Affery Flintwinch. When he arrives, however, Jeremiah is on the front step and treats him very rudely, at the same time informing him that his mother is presently receiving Mr. Casby and his daughter Flora. He goes up anyway and asks for a private word with his mother. When he tells her what he has learned about Blandois, however, she says that whatever he was in the past is nothing to her; this rejection seems to please the eavesdropping Flintwinch very much indeed. Thus Arthur's only recourse is to speak to Mistress Affery. With considerable effort he manages to get her alone, but her fear of her husband is such that she refuses to tell him anything. She does promise, however, that if he ever manages to gain the upper hand on the two "clever ones" (her mistress and her husband), she will tell him her "dreams."

While rumors circulate around London that Merdle is about to be elevated to a peerage, Mr. and Mrs. Sparkler are unhappy in their opulent home. Fanny is bored with her fool of a husband and cannot tolerate boredom; she thus determines to invite Amy to stay with them after she finishes nursing poor Tip, who seems to have contracted malaria. Tip's illness prevents his father's affairs from being settled, which is a matter of considerable annoyance to Fanny, largely because she is anxious to ensure that Mrs. General, who had been dismissed by Tip immediately after Mr. Dorrit's death, gets nothing from the estate.

Merdle stops by the Sparkler residence, but has little to say other than asking to borrow a penknife. He refuses to attend the dinner party given by his doctor, though his wife is the center of attention there. After the party is over, the doctor stays up late reading, and is interrupted by a knock at the door. A messenger summons him to a local bath house, where he finds Merdle dead; apparently he slit his own throat with the penknife he had borrowed from Fanny. Rumors spread rapidly through London, both about the cause of his death and the reason why he would take his own life. Finally the word comes out that he was engaged in massive forgery and theft, and that all who entrusted their money to him are ruined, including Arthur Clennam, who invested with Merdle on the advice of Pancks.

Now the firm of Doyce and Clennam is bankrupt. Arthur and Pancks feel terrible, but more than anything else are sorry for Daniel Doyce, who has been brought down by their unwise decisions. Arthur is determined to turn over management of the business to their creditors and spend the rest of his life, if necessary, working off the debt he owes. Pancks offers his help, and goes to find his friend Rugg, the lawyer. Against Rugg's advice, Arthur is determined to clear Doyce's name publicly and take all the blame upon himself. As a result, within a few days he finds himself in the Marshalsea, in the very room to which William Dorrit had been confined for so many years.

In his cell, Arthur broods for hours, and his thoughts return repeatedly to Little Dorrit and the inspiration she has provided for all the good he has assayed in recent years. When John Chivery brings his belongings to the cell, he treats Arthur coldly, though the latter cannot understand why. John offers to let Arthur use the spare furniture in the cell without charge and invites him downstairs for tea, where he charges him with cruelty and hardness, though nothing could be further from Arthur's intention. After many hints and indirect statements, Arthur finally comes to understand that John is jealous of him because Amy loves him. Arthur swears that he never suspected such a thing, and still refuses to believe it. When he returns to his room, he

thinks again of his conversations with Little Dorrit, rereads her letters to him, and gradually comes to believe that what John said might actually be true. Soon he receives a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Plornish, who bring him food. When Mary Plornish expresses her relief that Little Dorrit is not there to see Arthur in such terrible circumstances, Arthur is forced to agree. Now that he believes that Amy does love him, he is thankful that he never knew of or acted on that love so that he would not bring her back to such a state, and is convinced that any hope for pursuing it is now gone forever.

Arthur falls into despair in prison, and largely keeps to himself, for which he is avoided by his fellow inmates. Ten or twelve weeks after his incarceration, he receives a visit from Ferdinand Barnacle of the Circumlocution Office. The main purpose of the visit is to advise Clennam never to bother the Circumlocution Office again, since its main purpose is to be left alone and allowed to do nothing. He leaves no hope whatsoever concerning Doyce's invention. After Barnacle leaves, Rugg appears, largely for the purpose of again trying to convince Arthur to agree to a move to the Queen's Bench Prison rather than the Marshalsea, a request that Arthur flatly refuses to consider. Then Blandois arrives, much to Arthur's astonishment, followed by Cavalletto and Pancks. When Arthur asks him to explain his involvement with his mother, Blandois admits that he has "a commodity" that he wishes to sell to her; clearly he is blackmailing her with some damaging information. He brazenly writes to her in Arthur's presence, demanding payment in one week unless she wants to risk the consequences. He also insists that she pay for his lodging while he is in London. While they wait for Pancks to return with Mrs. Clennam's answer, Blandois tells Arthur that he was also paid by Miss Wade to spy on Minnie Gowan and report on her activities. When Pancks returns he is accompanied by Flintwinch, who conveys Mrs. Clennam's agreement to Blandois' demands. All then leave the prison cell, with Blandois determined to force Cavalletto to serve him as of old, and Cavalletto determined not to let Blandois out of his sight. Arthur is again left alone with his thoughts.

In the days that follow, Arthur rarely eats or sleeps, and falls into despair, fearing that he is going mad. He avoids all visitors. Then one day flowers mysteriously appear in his room - the only source of delight he has known since his incarceration. Later the door to his room quietly opens, revealing none other than Little Dorrit herself, accompanied by Maggy. Once the tender reunion is completed, she immediately begins to nurse him and brings food, drink, and furnishings for his room, then sits beside him quietly working as she had sat by her father in days long past. She is now rich following her father's death, and she expresses her sincere desire to give it all to Arthur in gratitude for his protection and help in her family's poverty. Arthur, of course, refuses the offer, though his gratitude to her for making it is more than he can put into words. He finally tells her that he loves her, but insists that his condition forever separates them, and tells her she must not visit often. After she leaves, she speaks to John Chivery, asks him to see that Arthur wants for nothing, and makes him promise to tell him of her undying love, which the faithful soul does, despite the pain it costs him.

The week agreed upon by Rigaud and Mrs. Clennam passes, and the fatal day arrives. That evening, Rigaud, Cavalletto, and Pancks appear at her door. Mrs. Clennam abruptly dismisses Cavalletto and Pancks, but before he leaves, the latter exhorts Mrs. Flintwinch to tell her dreams. Her husband tries to get rid of her as well, but she will have none of it, even when Jeremiah threatens to beat her. Mrs. Clennam allows her to remain, then Rigaud steps forward and repeats their arrangement, first insisting that his hotel bill be paid, which Flintwinch does. Mrs. Clennam is to pay him two thousand pounds (extended from an original bargain of a

thousand) for certain papers that she will no doubt want to conceal. At this point, she refuses to give him anything unless he reveals the precise nature of the documents in question. He then tells what he knows of the Clennam family history. Arthur's father was a timid weakling, an orphan dominated by his uncle. The uncle was the one who forced him to marry Arthur's mother, much against his will. Surprisingly, Affery confirms all of this.

The newly-married Mrs. Clennam discovers a family secret, which she uses to her advantage and forces her husband not to reveal. At this point the enraged Mrs. Clennam picks up the story. The secret was that she is not Arthur's mother. Her husband had earlier contracted a secret marriage that had produced a son; the woman had yielded to the marriage into which Arthur's father was being forced, but he continued to support her. Mrs. Clennam forced the name out of Arthur's father, then visited the woman and demanded the child to raise as her own. She also insisted that Arthur's real mother have no further contact with Arthur or his father, and that she seek no further financial support from Arthur's father; in turn, Mrs. Clennam promises to meet her needs. The watch Mrs. Clennam has kept by her bedside all of these years, a gift of Mr. Clennam before his death, contains an inscription with the letters "DNF" - Do Not Forget, and she has not forgotten, nor did Arthur's father or real mother, for whom the arrangement was a constant source of torment, which Mrs. Clennam considered a just punishment for their sins. Arthur's mother descended into madness and died, the Clennam marriage was a union in name only, and the father died in misery. Mrs. Clennam thereafter took all her bitterness out on Arthur. Strangely enough, as she tells the story, Mrs. Clennam begins to move limbs and joints that have been unable to move for years.

At this point Rigaud insists that she move on to the pecuniary aspects of her secret. It turns out that Gilbert Clennam, Arthur's great uncle, relented on his deathbed and made provision for the woman who was Arthur's real mother. He asked Mrs. Clennam to witness and sign the codicil to his will, which she promptly concealed. The codicil left a thousand guineas to Arthur's mother, and an additional thousand to the youngest daughter of the man who had helped her along in the world - a man named Frederick Dorrit. Should the patron die childless, which he did, the thousand guineas were to go to the youngest daughter of his brother when she came of age (this, of course, would be Little Dorrit). This is the reason why Mrs. Clennam had given Amy employment, which she considered to be of far greater value than the thousand guineas that should have been hers. Flintwinch, the only one who knew Mrs. Clennam's secret, had been ordered to destroy the incriminating document, but instead had entrusted it to his twin brother, who had taken it abroad. He was the one encountered by Rigaud, who had taken the strongbox containing the will from him before he died in a drunken stupor. Flintwinch then reveals that his brother, who had been hired by Mrs. Clennam to care for Arthur's mother in her madness, had saved letters she had written, speaking of the truth of her situation and begging forgiveness. These, too, were in the strongbox recovered by Rigaud.

At this point, Mrs. Clennam, realizing that she has been defeated by the plotters, confesses that she lacks the money Rigaud demands, and asks for a payment schedule instead. He refuses to budge, and warns her that by sundown, copies of the papers will be in Arthur's hands in the Marshalsea, and all will be discovered. Mrs. Clennam, in her rage, rises from her wheelchair and rushes out of the room, down the steps and into the street, determined to arrive at the Marshalsea and intercept the documents before Arthur can read them. Affery follows her, but Rigaud and Flintwinch sit down calmly, convinced that, if Mrs. Clennam will not pay, Little Dorrit will in order to preserve Arthur's reputation.

Mrs. Dorrit arrives in time to reclaim the documents from Little Dorrit before she can read them or give them to Arthur, but she insists that Amy read them in her presence. She begs her forgiveness and promises to restore to her what is rightfully hers, but asks that Amy promise not to reveal the contents of the documents to Arthur until after she has died because she fears losing his respect, though she has never had his love. To this Little Dorrit agrees, but begs her to put away her fear, anger, and thoughts of vengeance and follow the example of Christ. Mrs. Clennam then asks Amy to return to her house and convince Rigaud that he no longer has any basis for blackmail, since Amy already knows the truth. As they arrive at the gate of the old house, however, it suddenly collapses into a pile of rubble. The only body discovered by the diggers is that of Rigaud. Affery Flintwinch had come in search of her mistress, while Jeremiah had rushed to the bank to draw out all the money possessed by the firm, with which he then flees to the Netherlands. Mrs. Clennam, meanwhile, suffers a stroke and is never able to move or communicate for the three years she lives on earth following the disaster.

Arthur, meanwhile, continues in the Marshalsea, his health declining daily. Pancks visits him regularly, but can do little. One day Casby, for whom Pancks collects rents, confronts him and demands that he squeeze the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard harder. He also expresses his dissatisfaction with the amount of time Pancks spends at the Marshalsea, and with the fact that his daughter Flora also shows considerable concern for Arthur (somehow he thinks this is Pancks' responsibility). Pancks can take no more of Casby's overbearing attitude. The two proceed to Bleeding Heart Yard, where Pancks calls the denizens together, announces that he is quitting Casby's service, and informs them that, though he, as the bill collector, has for years appeared the harsh one, Casby, who has presented himself as full of benevolence, has in reality been pressuring Pancks constantly to squeeze the poor people of the Yard as hard as possible. He ends his discourse by knocking Casby's hat off, cutting it to shreds, and cutting off Casby's long hair, of which he is inordinately proud, for extra measure. He stalks off proudly, much to the amusement of Bleeding Heart Yard.

Amy, it seems, must now care for everyone. In addition to nursing Arthur, she tries to sustain her sister Fanny, who has never recovered from the shock of Mr. Merdle committing suicide with the knife she had lent him, and Tip, who continues to be a drunken wastrel. Mrs. Merdle, now accepted back into society and pitied as a victim, has acquired stylish mourning garb and feuds daily with Fanny, leaving poor Sparkler in the middle, so that when he tries to intervene in their squabbles, they inevitably both turn against him. Mrs. General also has returned from the Continent, and constantly pesters the family for letters of recommendation, though no one ever seems to hire her. Amy's only comfort and support is Mr. Meagles, who remains abroad, but whose correspondence enables Amy to pour out her concerns for Arthur. Meagles recognizes the importance of securing the original documents rather than mere copies, and dedicates himself to the task. Gowan, meanwhile, has broken off all connections with his in-laws, though Mr. Meagles continues to favor Pet with occasional financial sustenance.

As Meagles searches for the documents stolen by Rigaud, he accomplishes nothing, hindered by his inability to speak any language but English. When he arrives in Paris, however, he receives a letter from Amy telling him of the possible involvement of Miss Wade in Rigaud's schemes. He goes to Calais in order to seek her out. Miss Wade, however, rude as usual, denies knowledge of any papers in the possession of Rigaud. Mr. and Mrs. Meagles then return to London and go straight to the Marshalsea. As they wait for Amy to arrive, the door opens to reveal none other than Tattycoram. She carries the document box left by Rigaud with Miss Wade.

She had been hidden in the back room when Meagles visited the house in Calais, and quickly realized that Miss Wade, because of her hatred of the Meagles family and Arthur Clennam, would never give up the box. She therefore took it, snuck out of the house, and took a ship for England. She throws herself on the floor, begs the forgiveness of her former benefactors, and asks them to take her back, and even to give her back her old name, which she had in the past found so demeaning. She tells them that Miss Wade had continued to aggravate in her the tendency to ascribe ill to everyone and everything, and had made her completely miserable. They embrace her and readily agree to forgive her and take her back. Little Dorrit is overjoyed to have the papers, knowing now that she can tell Arthur the truth about himself while concealing the injury she had received from his stepmother. At the moment, however, Arthur is too ill to receive visitors, and Meagles leaves with the intention to retrieve Daniel Doyce from the Continent and get Arthur out of the Marshalsea.

Autumn now arrives, and Arthur, still weak, sits in his cell as Amy reads to him. She has received letters from Meagles and Doyce indicating that Arthur's days in the Marshalsea will soon come to an end. He pours out his gratitude for her constant attentions, then reminds her that they soon must part because he could not bear to hold her back from her rightful place in the world. She speaks to him of her great fortune, which he still refuses to touch. She soon admits to him, however, that she, along with Tip and Fanny, have been left penniless by Merdle's swindle, which had eaten up her father's entire fortune. When she asks him to share her fortune now, he readily assents, and the two fall into one another's arms, never again to be parted. When Amy descends from Arthur's room, she is met by Flora, who sincerely congratulates her and withdraws any claims she might have had on her long-ago intended.

After some time Meagles returns. He reports that Doyce has done wonderfully well abroad, now that he is no longer subject to the tender mercies of the Circumlocution Office; he is rich, heads up a thriving business, and has received honors that he never would have gotten in England. Doyce himself soon enters, and the two old friends embrace warmly. He quickly tells Arthur that he holds nothing against him and fully expects him to learn from his mistake. His old job as partner in Doyce and Clennam is open to him, and he is therefore free to walk out of the Marshalsea immediately. Nonetheless, he remains in the cell one more night while Amy makes arrangements for them to be married. The next morning the deed is done, though Amy insists that, before they wed, Arthur burn a certain document she hands to him. In the days that follow, Pancks becomes the chief clerk and later partner at Doyce and Clennam, Amy cares for Fanny's children as well as her own, and nurses Tip, who never leaves his dissipated life, while Arthur and his Little Dorrit live a modest and happy life thereafter.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Monsieur Rigaud (also known as Blandois) – A man who lives by his wits, he is a murderer and blackmailer who discovers Mrs. Clennam's secret and tries to use it to his own advantage. He is killed when the Clennam house collapses.
- Giovanni Baptista Cavalletto ("Mr. Baptist") - A petty Italian criminal who meets Rigaud in prison but soon seeks to avoid his company. He comes to England determined to reform, and winds up working for Daniel Doyce and living in Bleeding Heart Yard.

- Mr. and Mrs. Meagles – An English couple in their fifties, they meet Arthur Clennam in France and become good and faithful friends. Mr. Meagles introduces Arthur to Daniel Doyce, which leads to the partnership between the two.
- Minnie “Pet” Meagles – Their daughter, a lovely girl of twenty, who makes the unfortunate decision to marry Henry Gowan and lives unhappily ever after, though she never stops loving him.
- Tattycoram (Harriet Beadle) – Taken from an orphanage by Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, she becomes Pet’s maid but is insanely resentful of her inferior status. She runs away to live with Miss Wade, but living with the bitter spinster finally awakens her to the kindness of those she had rejected.
- Miss Wade – A self-assured and solitary young woman who meets the Meagles family in Marseilles. She knows nothing of her parentage, is angry with the entire world, and draws Harriet into her bitter circle.
- Arthur Clennam – A forty-year-old man recently returned from Egypt upon the death of his father, he is an inveterate dreamer. He eventually falls in love with and ultimately marries Little Dorrit.
- Mrs. Clennam - Supposedly Arthur’s mother, she is a stern invalid who has not left her bedroom for twelve years. She has treated Arthur with coldness his entire life because he is not really her son - a secret that she intends to keep forever - and is furious when he decides to leave the family business. She also has cheated Little Dorrit out of money left to her by Arthur’s grandfather. She serves as a Dickens’ caricature of a Calvinist.
- Jeremiah Flintwinch - An elderly manservant who has served as clerk to the Clennams as long as anyone can remember. He alone has the courage to bully and manipulate his mistress because he knows her secrets. He becomes involved in a shady partnership with Blandois to profit from those secrets, then absconds with the firm’s funds shortly before the truth comes out.
- Affery Flintwinch - Jeremiah’s wife, she is Mrs. Clennam’s elderly and decrepit maidservant. She overhears many of her husband’s conversations, and eventually tells Mrs. Clennam what she has overheard.
- Flora Finching - Enamored of Arthur Clennam in her youth, she is now a fat widow who still carries a torch for Arthur and is largely characterized by her outrageous run-on sentences.
- Christopher Casby - He is Flora’s father, and is the owner of much of the real estate in Bleeding Heart Yard. While he loves to present himself as a benevolent benefactor of the poor, he really presses his rent collector to squeeze his tenants for money continually.

- Mr. Pancks - Casby's rent collector, he initially comes across as harsh and unfeeling, but shows his real character later in the story by helping and encouraging Arthur in his efforts to get to the bottom of his mother's secret. He is also responsible for encouraging Arthur to invest the funds of Doyce and Clennam by placing them in the hands of Merdle, and thus losing everything.
- Mr. and Mrs. Plornish - Former inhabitants of the Marshalsea, they set up a small business in Bleeding Heart Yard, which constantly struggles because the poor inhabitants of the Yard are always eager to buy but rarely able to pay.
- Amy Dorrit - A sweet but impoverished girl who lives in a debtors' prison, she is hired as a seamstress by Mrs. Clennam. Her father then inherits substantial wealth, but she cares nothing for money. After Arthur is forced into debtors' prison after the collapse of Mr. Merdle's financial empire, she cares for him and eventually marries him upon his release.
- William Dorrit - Amy Dorrit's father, he falls into a hopeless depression when remanded to a debtors' prison, and is there so long that he comes to be known as the Father of the Marshalsea. He is totally dependent on his youngest daughter's ministrations and lives in a dream world, thinking himself still a member of the aristocracy. After inheriting wealth, he takes his family to Europe, putting on airs like the aristocrat he professes to be, but dies before he is able to return to England.
- Fanny Dorrit - Little Dorrit's elder sister, she becomes a dancer after Amy arranges for her to take lessons in the Marshalsea. After the family becomes wealthy, she is wooed by and marries Edmund Sparkler, a weak fool and wastrel who is attractive only because his stepfather is the fabulously wealthy Mr. Merdle.
- Edward "Tip" Dorrit - Amy's lazy brother, he quits every job Amy finds for him until he returns to the Marshalsea as an inmate. When the family inherits wealth, he spends his days in a drunken stupor.
- Frederick Dorrit - Amy's uncle, he too has been ruined by his brother William's financial indiscretions. He supports himself in a shabby musical theater, and takes in Fanny when she begins to dance there. We later learn that he had cared for Arthur's real mother after she had been cast off.
- Bob - A turnkey in the Marshalsea, he becomes Amy Dorrit's godfather and befriends the child as she grows up.
- Maggy - A mentally-handicapped woman who is treated kindly by Amy and calls her "Little Mother."

- Daniel Doyce - An inventor whose work has become lost irrevocably in the coils of the Circumlocution Office, he perseveres and eventually takes on Arthur Clennam as his business partner, setting up a factory in Bleeding Heart Yard in London. The business is ruined with the collapse of the Merdle empire, but Doyce takes his talents to Arabia, where he reestablishes the business and brings Arthur from the Marshalsea into renewed prosperity.
- Henry Gowan – A self-possessed ne’er-do-well who dabbles in painting and repeatedly seeks to court, and finally marries, Pet Meagles.
- Mr. and Mrs. Merdle - A wealthy financier and member of Parliament and his wife; she is a friend of Henry Gowan’s mother. He turns out to be a swindler, commits suicide as his crimes are about to be revealed, and ruins all who have placed their money with him, including Arthur, Doyce, and the Dorrits.
- Edmund Sparkler - Mrs. Merdle’s ne’er-do-well weakling of a son who takes a romantic interest in every girl he meets, including Fanny Dorrit, whom he marries.
- “Young” John Chivery – The son of a turnkey in the Marshalsea, he is in love with Little Dorrit, though she has no interest in him other than as a friend, a role that he plays faithfully throughout the story. His greatest literary effort is the composition of his own epitaph, which he revises continually as the conditions of his life change.
- Mrs. General - A martinet of a widow hired by William Dorrit as a companion for Fanny and Amy in their travels abroad, he falls in love with her, but dies before he can propose marriage.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet *us*, from many strange places and by many strange roads, and what it is set to us to do to them, and what is set to them to do to us, will all be done.” (Miss Wade, Book I, ch.2, p.32)

“In the very hour of his return almost - before the shoe upon his foot is dry - he asperses his father’s memory to his mother! Asks his mother to become, with him, a spy upon his father’s transactions through a lifetime! Has misgivings that the goods of this world which we have painfully got together early and late, with wear and tear, and toil and self-denial, are so much plunder; and asks to whom they shall be given up, as reparation and restitution!” (Mrs. Clennam, Book I, ch.5, p.57)

“He withers away in his prison; I wither away in mine; inexorable justice is done; what do I owe on this score!” (Mrs. Clennam, as imagined by Arthur, Book I, ch.8, p.97)

“We should all have been lost without Amy. She is a very good girl, Amy. She does her duty.” (Frederick Dorrit, Book I, ch.9, p.102)

“The Circumlocution Office was (as everybody knows without being told) the most important Department under Government. . . . Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving – HOW NOT TO DO IT.” (Book I, ch.10, p.112)

“He was a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honorable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reversing the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity.” (Book I, ch.13, p.176)

“A composed and unobtrusive self-sustainment was noticeable in Daniel Doyce – a calm knowledge that what was true must remain true, in spite of all the Barnacles in the family ocean, and would be just the truth, and neither more nor less, when even that sea had run dry – which had a kind of greatness in it, though not of the official quality.” (Book I, ch.16, p.203)

“Nothing would have been wanting to the perfection of his character as a fraternal guide, philosopher, and friend, if he had only steered his brother clear of ruin, instead of bringing it upon him.” (Book I, ch.19, p.235)

“Duty on earth, restitution on earth, action on earth; these first, as the first steep steps upward. Strait was the gate and narrow was the way; far straiter and narrower than the broad high road paved with vain professions and vain repetitions, moles from other men’s eyes and liberal delivery of others to the judgment – all cheap materials costing absolutely nothing.” (Book I, ch.27, p.336)

“O! If he had known, if he had known! If he could have seen the dagger in his hand, and the cruel wounds it struck in the faithful bleeding breast of his Little Dorrit!” (Book I, ch.32, p.400)

“For as my business with this set of gentlemen was to do a public duty and a public service, and as their business with me was to prevent it by wearing my soul out, I think we had better not eat and drink together with a show of being of one mind.” (Daniel Doyce, Book I, ch.34, p.419)

“Brother, I protest against pride. I protest against ingratitude. I protest against any one of us here who have known what we have known, and have seen what we have seen, setting up any pretension that puts Amy at a moment’s disadvantage, or to the cost of a moment’s pain.” (Frederick Dorrit, Book II, ch.5, p.506)

“A perfect fury for making acquaintances on whom to impress their riches and importance had seized the House of Dorrit.” (Book II, ch.7, p.532-533)

“He regarded her from a point of view which in its remoteness, tender as it was, he little thought would have been unspeakable agony to her. He speculated about her future destiny, and about the husband she might have, with an affection for her which would have drained her heart of its dearest drop of hope, and broken it.” (Book II, ch.8, p.541)

“Her absence in his altered fortunes made it, and him in it, so very desolate and so much in need of such a face of love and truth, that he turned against the wall to weep, sobbing out, as his heart relieved itself, ‘O my Little Dorrit!’” (Book II, ch.26, p.750).

“O, Mrs. Clennam, Mrs. Clennam, angry feelings and unforgiving deeds are no comfort and no guide to you and me. My life has been passed in this poor prison, and my teaching has been very defective; but, let me implore you to remember later and better days. Be guided only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. There is no vengeance and no infliction of suffering in His life, I am sure. There can be no confusion in following Him, and seeking for no other footsteps, I am certain!” (Little Dorrit, Book II, ch.31, p.825-826)

“If she [Little Dorrit] had constantly thought of herself, and settled with herself that everybody visited this place upon her, turned it against her, and cast it at her, she would have led an irritable and probably an useless existence. Yet I have heard tell, Tattycoram, that her young life has been one of active resignation, goodness, and noble service.” (Meagles, Book II, ch.33, p.847)

“I never was rich before, I never was proud before, I never was happy before, I am rich in being taken by you, I am proud in having been resigned by you, I am happy in being with you in this prison, as I should be happy in coming back to it with you, if it should be the will of God, and comforting and serving you with all my love and truth. I am yours anywhere, everywhere! I love you dearly! I would rather pass my life here with you, and go out daily, working for our bread, than I would have the greatest fortune that ever was told, and be the greatest lady that ever was honored.” (Little Dorrit, Book II, ch.34, p.851-852)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In Charles Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*, the author demonstrates his understanding of true and false religion through the characters of Amy Dorrit and Mrs. Clennam, respectively. Citing specific quotations, describe Dickens’ opinions on the subject of true religion. Does his belief correspond to the teachings of Scripture? Why or why not?
2. As in many of his novels, Charles Dickens’ *Little Dorrit* takes dead aim on the British prison system, especially the practice of imprisonment for debt, from which his family had suffered personally. Isolate three central criticisms Dickens directs at the system, and describe the literary techniques he uses to give power to his satire.

3. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, the author describes Arthur Clennam in these words: "He was a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honorable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reversing the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity." What does this quotation tell us, not about Arthur, but about Dickens, especially his attitude toward evangelical Christianity?
4. Compare and contrast the protagonists in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Pay attention to their strength of character, their humility, and their willingness to sacrifice their own desires for the good of others. Which of the two more effectively displays Christian values? Why do you think so?
5. Compare and contrast the protagonist in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Lizzie Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend*. Pay attention to their strength of character, their humility, and their willingness to sacrifice their own desires for the good of others. Which of the two more effectively displays Christian values? Why do you think so?
6. Compare and contrast the protagonists in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*. Pay attention to their strength of character, their humility, and their willingness to sacrifice their own desires for the good of others. Which of the two more effectively displays Christian values? Why do you think so?
7. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the protagonists function as saviors for the men they love. Compare and contrast the two in the ways in which they carry out that role, giving careful attention to the personalities of the two girls. Does it make a difference that one book was written by a man and the other by a woman? Why or why not?
8. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, the sneering villain of the piece may be Rigaud, otherwise known as Blandois, but the real target of the author's satire is British society. Consider the role played by the Circumlocution Office, which Dickens intended as a stand-in for the Treasury Department, in the plot. What is Dickens satirizing through this absurd government entity? Can you identify any contemporary parallels that might be suitable targets for his social criticism?
9. The British class system is often the target of Charles Dickens' satire, and *Little Dorrit* is no exception. The Barnacles, the Merdles, and even the pretensions of the suddenly-rich William Dorrit become vehicles by which the author lampoons the follies of the British upper class. What are his main concerns in directing this criticism? Choose three reasons behind his critique of the British class structure and show the techniques he uses to bring these out in the novel.

10. The original title of Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* was *Nobody's Fault*. To what extent can the novel be read as a critique of irresponsibility, both corporate and individual? Choose three characters or organizations in the novel that the author uses to advance this criticism, and show how they bring out different aspects of the consequences of irresponsible behavior.
11. The original title of Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* was *Nobody's Fault*. Many critics have noted that, while Arthur Clennam repeatedly describes himself as a Nobody, most of the characters in the story fit the description far better than he does. To what extent does Dickens communicate the idea that society is filled with nonentities whose true character is not recognized, either by themselves or by others? Are these vacuous "nobodies" the ones who are really at fault for the deep flaws of English society? Support your argument with specifics from the novel.
12. Compare and contrast the criticisms of the British government found in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House*. The two were written one after the other, and targeted the Treasury and Chancery Court. Which critique do you think is the most effective, and why? Do the obvious exaggerations in which Dickens engages enhance or detract from the power of his satire? Why or why not?
13. Many of the characters in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* are ruined financially by investing in the schemes of Mr. Merdle, who turns out to be a swindler. Analyze the nature of the criticism in which Dickens is here engaged. Is he mocking greed, the social exaltation of the rich, an economic structure that encourages speculation and get-rich-quick schemes rather than hard work, or all of the above? Use specific examples from the novel to support your analysis.
14. Much of the important action in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* takes place in prison - the jail in Marseilles where Blandois and Cavalletto first meet, the quarantine facility that brings the Meagles family and Arthur Clennam together, and the Marshalsea, which first houses the Dorrit family and later Arthur himself. Dickens' use of the prison metaphor is not restricted to literal jails, however. He often describes lodging places, neighborhoods, cities, and even whole societies as prisons to those who inhabit them. Analyze Dickens' use of prison imagery in the novel. What is he ultimately saying here? What, in the end, is the real prison within which all are entrapped? Why does he think so?
15. Compare and contrast the characters of William Dorrit in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Walter Bray in the same author's *Nicholas Nickleby*. What traits do the two men have in common? Consider their views of themselves and their families, their impact on their respective daughters, and the way they have been affected by their residence in a debtors' prison. What messages is Dickens trying to convey through these characters, their behavior, and their predicaments?

16. Charles Dickens' father was once imprisoned for debt, and as a consequence sent his twelve-year-old son out to work in a boot-black factory - the worst, and in some ways the most formative, experience of young Charles' life. The pain of this experience shows up in Dickens' novels in many forms, one of which is the character of the selfish debtor. Compare and contrast the treatment of this character in the persons of Walter Bray in *Nicholas Nickleby* and William Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*. Does Dickens' sympathy for or understanding of his father's experience progress at all between the two novels, which were written almost twenty years apart? Why or why not? Use details from the two novels to support your conclusions.
17. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, some critics have argued that the fabulously wealthy Mr. Merdle is as much a prisoner as the poverty-stricken William Dorrit. To what extent is this true? In your answer, be sure to make use of specific quotations from the novel to support your conclusions.
18. Evangelist John Wesley once said, "Religion must necessarily produce both industry and capitalism, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches." To what extent does Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* serve as a commentary on Wesley's warning? Support Wesley's assessment, both from the novel and from Scripture.
19. While suicide is seen as a noble alternative to shame and disgrace in nineteenth-century France, as epitomized in Alexander Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the British viewed matters differently. For them, suicide was an escape chosen by the godless. As one writer said, "The God who was said to prohibit suicide has ceased to be a God for them, and that suicide being no longer interdicted by any power they respect, has become once more, in their eyes, a permissible solution for the difficulties of life." How does the pivotal suicide of Mr. Merdle in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* illustrate the truth of this comment?
20. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, Mrs. Clennam compares her state to that of William Dorrit in the following words: "He withers away in his prison; I wither away in mine; inexorable justice is done; what do I owe on this score!" How are their prisons the same, and how are they different? Is Mrs. Clennam's analogy justified? Explain why or why not.
21. Charles Dickens, in his novel *Little Dorrit*, implies that everyone lives in some sort of prison. Does he see any hope of emancipation? What is the remedy for the confined life that he pictures so powerfully? To what extent does the end of the novel answer the question? To what extent does Dickens leave it unanswered?
22. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, the title character is almost too good to be true. What do you consider her outstanding attributes? Choose three around which to develop your essay. Are these traits valued as highly by Scripture as they are by Dickens? Why or why not?

23. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, Arthur Clennam spends most of the novel totally unaware of Amy Dorrit's love for him. What explains the depths of his cluelessness? What aspects of his own character cause him to miss the adoration lavished on him by his dear Little Dorrit? Are these causes reasons for admiration? Why or why not?
24. Discuss the symbolism of Mrs. Clennam's watch in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*. Besides the significance of the inscription, what does the watch mean to the different characters who have contact with it? In particular, what does it mean to Mrs. Clennam herself? How does Dickens use it to help communicate some of the novel's central themes?
25. Discuss the relationship between setting and mood in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*. To what extent does Dickens indicate the moods of his characters by the settings in which he places them? Are there examples in the novel of situations where a character's mood does *not* match his or her setting? What do you think might be the significance of these situations? Be sure to use specifics from the novel to support your analysis.
26. Compare and contrast Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Give special attention to the characters of Lear and William Dorrit on the one hand and Cordelia and Amy Dorrit on the other. What themes do the two works have in common that the authors express through these central characters and their relationships?
27. A *foil* is a character in a story who brings out the traits in another character by his or her contrasting qualities. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, would you consider Arthur Clennam and Rigaud (or Blandois) to be foils? Why or why not? If they are, what opposite traits bring out the nature of each more clearly, and how do they do this?
28. In the long-standing debate between those who argue that human character is shaped largely by heredity or largely by environment, both sides can sometimes have the tendency to dismiss a person's responsibility for who he or she is. In Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, the author allows no such excuses. Discuss the ways in which he creates characters who manage to transcend either heredity or environment or both, as well as showing us people who, despite advantages in both areas, fall far short in the realm of character.
29. In Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the playwright puts these cynical words into the mouth of the governess Miss Prism as she describes a novel she had written long ago: "The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means." Among the targets of Wilde's ridicule was surely Charles Dickens, whose novels in most cases fit Miss Prism's caricature. To what extent is this true of *Little Dorrit*? Does the ending of the novel leave the reader with a sense of justice served? Why or why not? Is Dickens' creation of a moral universe realistic? Is it biblical?

30. In Mark 8:35, Jesus said, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” Some critics have argued that Charles Dickens’ *Little Dorrit* is an extended discourse on this principle of Christian renunciation. Do you agree? Is Amy Dorrit’s willingness to set aside the things of this world in order to be with Arthur, especially when seen in contrast to the behavior of many of the other characters in the book, an accurate picture of what Jesus was advocating? Why or why not?
31. Charles Dickens suffered a difficult childhood, and many of his novels present protagonists who did the same. In some cases, the difficulty was rooted in poverty, whether the debtors’ prison in which Amy Dorrit grew up or the orphanage that blighted the early childhood of Oliver Twist. Compare the sufferings of these two characters, both with regard to the treatment they received and its impact on their personalities. The eventual redemption experienced by the two is also very different. How does this contribute to the divergent themes of the two novels?
32. Charles Dickens suffered a difficult childhood, and many of his novels present protagonists who did the same. Some suffered in childhood as a result of severe repression, such as did David Copperfield and Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit*. Compare and contrast these two, both with regard to the nature of the repression they experienced and the consequences of it in their later lives. What do you think Dickens is trying to say by his creation of these characters? Consider what they eventually become as well as what they had to overcome to get there.
33. In Matthew 5:5, Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” To what extent does Charles Dickens’ *Little Dorrit* illustrate the truth of Jesus’ teaching? Be sure to incorporate specific quotations and incidents from the novel as you develop your essay.