

the ground has risen, so that the visitor enters it 'down a flight of steps', and leaves it 'by a low gateway into a maze of shabby streets . . . tortuously ascending to the level again' (p. 128). England's bleeding heart is well-hidden from the public gaze. West of the City, separated by some distance even from Arthur's lodgings, is the smart and fashionable end of town whose inhabitants are no more comfortably housed than the poorer characters in the novel. Mr Tite Barnacle lives in 'a squeezed house' in 'a hideous little street' (p. 106) near Grosvenor Square, and after her marriage to Edmund Sparkler, Fanny Dorrit lives in a house that is 'a triumph of inconvenience', even though it is 'in the centre of the habitable globe' (p. 655). 'In one of the parasite streets' to these 'smart' addresses, Miss Wade rents 'a dingy house' (p. 308). Merdle occupies a grand house in Harley Street, Cavendish Square, but it has a grim and dull outlook and 'inconvenient fixtures' (p. 234) and Merdle himself is never at home or comfortable in it. When he returns to London, Mr Dorrit lives in a splendid hotel in nearby Brook Street (p. 579). This is the part of London where people think they *ought* to live, far from the crowded areas further east yet convenient for the City and close to the centres of power and privilege such as the Circumlocution Office.

South of the river, on Borough High Street, which runs out of London Bridge, stands the claustrophobic Marshalsea Prison, 'an oblong pile of barrack building . . . environed by a narrow paved yard, hemmed in by high walls' (p. 58). Other places of incarceration are nearby: Horsemonger-Lane Jail (p. 204), further down Borough High Street, and Bedlam Hospital to the west (p. 745). Adjacent to the Marshalsea is St George's Church, where Little Dorrit is christened and married, and where she sleeps in the vestry with the burial register as a pillow after she and Maggy are locked out of their lodgings and, in a dream-like sequence in which they encounter the city's outcasts, spend most of the night on the streets (p. 168). From this church Arthur and Amy, freed at last from their individual prisons, join the London life of which they are inevitably a part.

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CHARACTERS IN THE BOOK

CLARENCE BARNACLE ('Barnacle Junior'), son of Mr Tite Barnacle; a young gentleman employed in the Circumlocution Office

LORD DECIMUS TITE BARNACLE, a peer, highly placed in the Circumlocution Office

FERDINAND BARNACLE, private secretary to the preceding; a good-looking, well-dressed, agreeable young fellow

MR TITE BARNACLE, a high official in the Circumlocution Office

BOB, turnkey of the Marshalsea Prison; godfather to Little Dorrit

CHRISTOPHER CASBY, landlord of Bleeding Heart Yard; a selfish, crafty imposter, who grinds his tenants by proxy

JOHN BAPTIST CAVALLETTO, a fellow prisoner with Rigaud at Marseilles

JOHN CHIVERY, a non-resident turnkey of Marshalsea Prison

YOUNG JOHN CHIVERY, his sentimental son; a lover of Little Dorrit

ARTHUR CLENNAM, the adopted son of Mrs Clennam

EDWARD DORRIT ('Tip'), son of Mr William Dorrit; a spendthrift and an idler

MR FREDERICK DORRIT, brother to Mr William Dorrit; a man of retired and simple habits, supporting himself as a clarionet player

MR WILLIAM DORRIT, a prisoner for debt in the Marshalsea; a shy, irresolute man, but a strong assertor of the 'family dignity'

DANIEL DOYCE, an engineer and inventor

JEREMIAH FLINTWINCH, servant and afterwards partner of Mrs Clennam

HENRY GOWAN, an artist

MR MEAGLES, a retired banker, of benevolent disposition

MR MERDLE, a popular financier on an extensive scale



CHAPTER I

Sun and Shadow

THIRTY YEARS AGO,⁵ Marseilles lay burning in the sun one day.

A blazing sun upon a fierce August day was no greater rarity in southern France then than at any other time, before or since. Everything in Marseilles, and about Marseilles, had stared at the fervid sky, and been stared at in return, until a staring habit had become universal there. Strangers were stared out of countenance by staring white houses, staring white walls, staring white streets, staring tracts of arid road, staring hills from which verdure was burnt away. The only things to be seen not fixedly staring and glaring were the vines drooping under their load of grapes. These did occasionally wink a little, as the hot air barely moved their faint leaves.

There was no wind to make a ripple on the foul water within the harbour, or on the beautiful sea without. The line of demarcation between the two colours, black and blue, showed the point which the pure sea would not pass; but it lay as quiet as the abominable pool, with which it never mixed. Boats without awnings were too hot to touch; ships blistered at their moorings; the stones of the quays had not cooled, night or day, for months. Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genoese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendants from all the builders of Babel,⁶ come to trade at Marseilles, sought the shade alike – taking refuge in any hiding-place from a sea too intensely blue to be looked at, and a sky of purple set with one great flaming jewel of fire.

The universal stare made the eyes ache. Towards the distant line of Italian coast, indeed, it was a little relieved by light clouds of mist, slowly rising from the evaporation of the sea; but it softened nowhere else. Far away the staring roads, deep in dust, stared from the hillside, stared from the hollow, stared from the interminable plain. Far away the dusty vines overhanging wayside cottages, and the monotonous wayside avenues of parched trees without shade, drooped beneath the stare of earth and sky. So did the horses with drowsy bells, in long files of carts, creeping slowly towards the interior; so did their recumbent drivers when they were awake, which rarely happened; so did the exhausted labourers in the

fields. Everything that lived or grew was oppressed by the glare; except the lizard, passing swiftly over rough stone walls, and the cicada, chirping his dry hot chirp, like a rattle. The very dust was scorched brown, and something quivered in the atmosphere as if the air itself were panting.

Blinds, shutters, curtains, awnings, were all closed and drawn to keep out the stare. Grant it but a chink or keyhole, and it shot in like a white-hot arrow. The churches were the freest from it. To come out of the twilight of pillars and arches – dreamily dotted with winking lamps, dreamily peopled with ugly old shadows piously dozing, spitting, and begging – was to plunge into a fiery river, and swim for life to the nearest strip of shade. So, with people lounging and lying wherever shade was, with but little hum of tongues or barking of dogs, with occasional jangling of discordant church bells, and rattling of vicious drums, Marseilles, a fact to be strongly smelt and tasted, lay broiling in the sun one day.

In Marseilles that day there was a villainous prison.⁷ In one of its chambers, so repulsive a place that even the obtrusive stare blinked at it, and left it to such refuse of reflected light as it could find for itself, were two men. Besides the two men, a notched and disfigured bench, immovable from the wall, with a draught-board rudely hacked upon it with a knife, a set of draughts made of old buttons and soup bones, a set of dominoes, two mats, and two or three wine-bottles. That was all the chamber held, exclusive of rats and other unseen vermin, in addition to the seen vermin, the two men.

It received such light as it got through a grating of iron bars, fashioned like a pretty large window, by means of which it could be always inspected from the gloomy staircase on which the grating gave. There was a broad strong ledge of stone to this grating, where the bottom of it was let into the masonry, three or four feet above the ground. Upon it, one of the two men lolled, half sitting and half lying, with his knees drawn up, and his feet and shoulders planted against the opposite sides of the aperture. The bars were wide enough apart to admit of his thrusting his arm through to the elbow; and so he held on negligently, for his greater ease.

A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damp, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement. As the captive men were faded and haggard, so the iron was rusty, the stone was slimy, the wood was rotten, the air was faint, the light was dim. Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside; and would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact in one of the spice islands of the Indian Ocean.

The man who lay on the ledge of the grating was even chilled. He jerked his great cloak more heavily upon him by an impatient movement of one shoulder, and growled, 'To the devil with this Brigand of a Sun that never shines in here!'

He was waiting to be fed; looking sideways through the bars, that he might see the further down the stairs, with much of the expression of a wild beast in similar expectation. But his eyes, too close together, were not so nobly set in his head as those of the king of beasts are in his, and they were sharp rather than bright – pointed weapons with little surface to betray them. They had no depth or change; they glittered, and they opened and shut. So far, and waiving their use to himself, a clockmaker could have made a better pair. He had a hook nose, handsome after its kind, but too high between the eyes, by probably just as much as his eyes were too near to one another. For the rest, he was large and tall in frame, had thin lips where his thick moustache showed them at all, and a quantity of dry hair, of no definable colour in its shaggy state, but shot with red. The hand with which he held the grating (seamed all over the back with ugly scratches newly healed) was unusually small and plump; would have been unusually white, but for the prison grime.

The other man was lying on the stone floor, covered with a coarse brown coat.

'Get up, pig!' growled the first. 'Don't sleep when I am hungry.'

'It's all one, master,' said the pig in a submissive manner, and not without cheerfulness; 'I can wake when I will, I can sleep when I will. It's all the same.'

As he said it, he rose, shook himself, scratched himself, tied his brown coat loosely round his neck by the sleeves (he had previously used it as a coverlet), and sat down upon the pavement yawning, with his back against the wall opposite to the grating.

'Say what the hour is,' grumbled the first man.

'The midday bells will ring – in forty minutes.' When he made the little pause, he had looked round the prison-room, as if for certain information.

'You are a clock. How is it that you always know?'

'How can I say? I always know what the hour is, and where I am. I was brought in here at night, and out of a boat, but I know where I am. See here! Marseilles Harbour;' on his knees on the pavement, mapping it all out with a swarthy forefinger; 'Toulon (where the galleys are), Spain over there, Algiers over *there*. Creeping away to the left here, Nice. Round by the Cornice to Genoa. Genoa Mole and Harbour: Quarantine ground. City there; terrace gardens blushing with the bella donna. Here, Porto Fino. Stand out for Leghorn. Out again for Civita