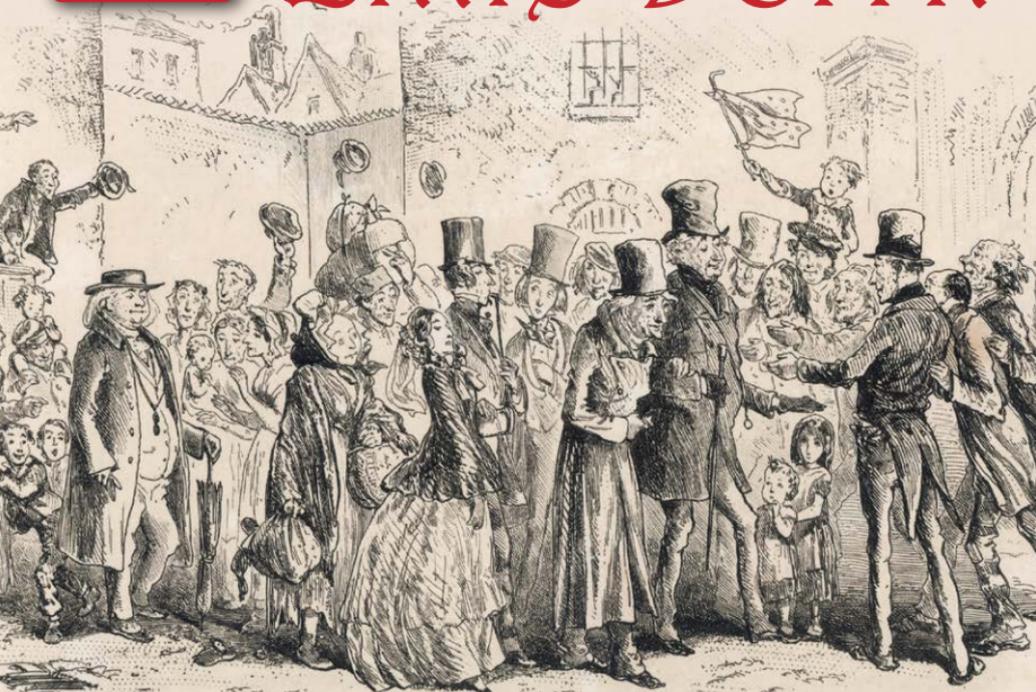


**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

COMPLETE  
CLASSICS  
UNABRIDGED

**Charles Dickens**

# Little Dorrit



Read by **Anton Lesser**

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## CD 1

1	<b>BOOK THE FIRST:</b> Poverty	6:36
	<b>Chapter 1:</b> Sun and Shadow	
2	The man who lay on the ledge of the grating was even chilled.	6:57
3	The child put all these things between the bars...	6:30
4	There seemed to be some uncomfortable attraction...	6:34
5	'Be it as it may, Madame Barronneau approved of me.'	3:37
6	He stepped aside to the ledge where the vine leaves yet lay...	6:52
7	<b>Chapter 2:</b> Fellow Travellers	7:08
8	"What's the matter, Mother?" said I...	6:09
9	'I thank you,' said the other...	4:41
10	They were about thirty in company...	6:13
11	'Are you' – she turned her eyes, and Pet faltered...	3:43
12	Now, there were many stairs and passages...	4:38
13	<b>Chapter 3:</b> Home	3:13
14	Mr Arthur Clennam sat in the window of the coffee-house...	5:26

**Total time on CD 1: 78:23**

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## CD 2

1	He crossed by St Paul's and went down, at a long angle,...	6:18
2	Arthur followed him up the staircase...	5:47
3	The old man, who had been standing by the door...	6:53
4	Arthur opened the long low window, and looked out...	6:42
5	<b>Chapter 4:</b> Mrs Flintwinch has a Dream	7:58
6	<b>Chapter 5:</b> Family Affairs	6:55
7	'You knew my father infinitely better than I ever knew him...'	7:03
8	Thus was she always balancing her bargains...	7:00
9	Little Dorrit let herself out to do needlework.	4:07
10	The room Arthur Clennam's deceased father had occupied...	4:19
11	<b>Chapter 6:</b> The Father of the Marshalsea	6:55
12	The affairs of this debtor were perplexed by a partnership...	3:22
13	The doctor and the debtor ran down-stairs...	4:39

**Total time on CD 2: 78:05**

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## CD 3

1	By this time, the rings had begun to fall...	6:31
2	The turnkey went off the lock of this world next day.	5:49
3	<b>Chapter 7:</b> The Child of the Marshalsea	6:21
4	In those early days, the turnkey first began profoundly...	7:06
5	The success of this beginning, which led to the dancing-master's...	6:26
6	'Well, my dear,' said the turnkey, 'something ought to be done...'	5:32
7	For the first time in all those years, she sunk under her cares.	2:19
8	<b>Chapter 8:</b> The Lock	6:59
9	She had brought the meat home that she should have eaten herself...	7:15
10	All this time, though he had finished his supper...	6:41
11	She was so tremulous and agitated, and he was so moved...	5:14
12	The two tables put together in a corner, were, at length, converted...	3:31
13	<b>Chapter 9:</b> Little Mother	4:47
14	As these people passed him standing still in the court-yard...	4:07

**Total time on CD 3: 78:44**

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## CD 4

1	There was no-one there.	6:36
2	'I am sorry to hear you were so inconvenienced last night...'	5:39
3	She had relieved the faithful fullness of her heart...	7:04
4	She was about eight-and-twenty, with large bones...	7:21
5	<b>Chapter 10:</b> Containing the whole Science of Government	5:40
6	Sometimes, angry spirits attacked the Circumlocution Office.	5:47
7	The present Barnacle, holding Mr Clennam's card in his hand...	7:23
8	Mr Barnacle dated from a better time...	6:58
9	Its effect upon young Barnacle was to make him...	7:18
10	This airy young Barnacle was quite entertained by his simplicity...	5:12
11	Clennam wondered within himself, as they took the nearest way...	5:06
12	With this prelude, Mr Meagles went through the narrative...	7:42

**Total time on CD 4: 77:52**

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## CD 5

1	Arthur could not but glance at Daniel Doyce in the ensuing silence.	1:43
2	<b>Chapter 11:</b> Let Loose	6:28
3	The landlady, having given her directions...	6:33
4	The guest sat looking at her as he smoked out his final cigarette...	7:12
5	'Cavalletto. This is in confidence.'	6:15
6	<b>Chapter 12:</b> Bleeding Heart Yard	5:52
7	He was at a loss to understand what she meant...	6:54
8	The remark appeared to suggest to Plornish...	6:38
9	'Mr Plornish,' said Arthur, 'I trust to you, if you please...'	4:55
10	<b>Chapter 13:</b> Patriarchal	6:55
11	Philanthropists of both sexes had asked who he was...	6:56
12	'Halloa!' he said.	7:15

**Total time on CD 5: 73:42**

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## CD 6

1	'I am sure,' giggled Flora, tossing her head...	7:09
2	In the midst of her rapidity, she had found that out...	6:38
3	Mr Casby shook his head...	5:43
4	Mr F.'s Aunt sat silently defying him...	6:47
5	They had crossed Smithfield together...	6:09
6	'It's a serious injury, I suppose?' said Clennam...	6:03
7	<b>Chapter 14:</b> Little Dorrit's Party	4:00
8	Little Dorrit was not ashamed of her poor shoes.	6:07
9	As she made the confession, timidly hesitating...	4:38
10	'Little Dorrit,' said Clennam...	6:51
11	Once, Little Dorrit knocked with a careful hand...	7:06
12	They went back again to the gate...	3:53
13	<b>Chapter 15:</b> Mrs Flintwinch Has Another Dream	4:27

**Total time on CD 6: 75:38**

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## CD 7

1	On a wintry afternoon at twilight...	7:30
2	'Never mind that,' returned Jeremiah calmly...	6:36
3	Here the sound of the wheeled chair was heard upon the floor...	6:24
4	<b>Chapter 16: Nobody's Weakness</b>	7:05
5	'It is much to be regretted,' said Clennam...	6:08
6	The bell at the gate had scarcely sounded, when Mr Meagles came out...	6:59
7	'But come!' said Mr Meagles. 'You have had a long walk...'	7:33
8	Besides his dumb-waiter, Mr Meagles had two other not dumb waiters...	8:11
9	<b>Chapter 17: Nobody's Rival</b>	5:44
10	'Well, Gowan,' said Mr Meagles, even suppressing a sigh...	6:13
11	The latter part of the day turning out wet...	8:31

**Total time on CD 7: 77:00**

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## CD 8

1	When he had gone to his own room...	3:51
2	<b>Chapter 18:</b> Little Dorrit's Lover	4:41
3	The Chivery parents were not ignorant of their son's attachment...	6:44
4	The collegians were entertaining a considerable number of visitors...	6:25
5	The poor fellow stood gazing at her...	4:36
6	Young John dolefully protested that he would try to bear it in mind...	3:33
7	<b>Chapter 19:</b> The Father of the Marshalsea in Two or Three Relations	4:16
8	'I think, William,' said the object of his affectionate consideration...	5:53
9	With these words, and with a face expressive of many uneasy doubts...	7:28
10	His supper was cooking in a saucepan on the fire...	6:35
11	To keep his attention engaged, she talked with him...	6:53
12	<b>Chapter 20:</b> Moving in Society	5:19
13	At last they came into a maze of dust...	6:35
14	'And so, Amy,' said her sister...	5:18

**Total time on CD 8: 78:13**

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## CD 9

1	'Mrs Merdle,' said Fanny. 'My sister, ma'am.'	6:31
2	'Miss Dorrit,' said Mrs Merdle...	6:39
3	They spoke no more all the way back to the lodging...	4:40
4	<b>Chapter 21:</b> Mr Merdle's Complaint	6:49
5	Mr Sparkler having been in the Guards...	4:50
6	When they rose, so many of the magnates had something to say...	6:30
7	Bishop then betook himself up-stairs...	4:45
8	<b>Chapter 22:</b> A Puzzle	6:25
9	Mrs Chivery, who was a comfortable-looking woman...	6:24
10	The crowd in the street jostling the crowd in his mind...	6:24
11	These letters Clennam answered, with the aid of his pencil...	3:49
12	<b>Chapter 23:</b> Machinery in Motion	6:23
13	The purchase was completed within a month.	5:37
14	A diversion was occasioned here by Mr F.'s Aunt...	2:47

**Total time on CD 9: 78:40**

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## CD 10

1	'Though indeed,' she hurried on...	6:52
2	The Patriarch turning his head in a lumbering way...	6:10
3	'Mr Clennam,' he then began...	5:44
4	'In conclusion, Mr Pancks,' said Arthur...	5:39
5	<b>Chapter 24:</b> Fortune-Telling	5:02
6	'Really so sorry that I should happen to be late...'	6:50
7	Flora, uttering these words in a deep voice, enjoyed herself immensely.	7:07
8	'Find it a little dull, Miss Dorrit?' inquired Pancks...	5:01
9	If Little Dorrit were beyond measure perplexed by this curious conduct...	7:53
10	'Maggie, there was once upon a time a fine King...'	7:32
11	<b>Chapter 25:</b> Conspirators and Others	5:35
12	What Mr Chivery thought of these things...	6:35

**Total time on CD 10: 76:06**

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## CD 11

1	The ensuing business proceedings were brief, but curious...	7:14
2	Against these obstacles, the lame foreigner with the stick...	6:38
3	<b>Chapter 26: Nobody's State of Mind</b>	7:02
4	By this time they had visited the family on several occasions...	6:46
5	The venerable inhabitants of that venerable pile...	7:41
6	Mr Henry Gowan seemed to have a malicious pleasure...	6:28
7	As she shrugged her shoulders, Clennam stiffly bowed again.	5:50
8	<b>Chapter 27: Five-and-Twenty</b>	6:44
9	Mr Meagles, with a despondent countenance...	5:09
10	'To tell you the truth,' returned Mr Meagles...	6:52
11	'This is odd, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, softly.	6:55
12	She looked at him for an instant, and then said frowningly...	4:43

**Total time on CD 11: 78:06**

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## CD 12

1	<b>Chapter 28:</b> Nobody's Disappearance	5:39
2	Minnie was there alone. She had some roses in her hand...	6:37
3	Pet's affectionate heart was overcharged...	7:46
4	<b>Chapter 29:</b> Mrs Flintwinch goes on Dreaming	6:59
5	Slowly and thoughtfully Mrs Clennam's eyes turned...	6:16
6	Mistress Affery, whose fear of thunder and lightning...	7:45
7	<b>Chapter 30:</b> The Word of a Gentleman	6:06
8	Mr Blandois, not at all put out by this omission...	5:05
9	Thus expressing himself, he threw the draggled skirt...	6:02
10	Mr Blandois was Mr Flintwinch's most obedient humble servant.	6:53
11	Mr Flintwinch, finishing his tea, not only took a longer gulp...	5:55
12	Mr Blandois thanked her, and kissed his hand several times.	7:04

**Total time on CD 12: 78:13**

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## CD 13

1	As he returned him the candle, he looked at him once more...	5:18
2	<b>Chapter 31:</b> Spirit	7:07
3	Mr Dorrit was in the habit of receiving this old man...	7:02
4	Now, it happened that the Father of the Marshalsea...	4:23
5	The Father of the Marshalsea in the meantime...	6:57
6	His patronage did not stop here...	6:39
7	When Little Dorrit had her work on the table...	7:43
8	<b>Chapter 32:</b> More Fortune-Telling	6:52
9	If he had known the sharpness of the pain he caused...	6:38
10	She said this, looking at him with...	6:40
11	'Mr Clennam, Mr Rugg,' said Pancks.	2:14
12	<b>Chapter 33:</b> Mrs Merdle's Complaint	7:01
13	'But it is true,' said Mrs Gowan, with a highly moral air.	4:03

**Total time on CD 13: 78:44**

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## CD 14

1	Now, Mrs Merdle, who really knew her friend Society pretty well...	6:09
2	Mr Merdle, so twisting his hands into what hair he had...	6:51
3	Mr Merdle, left alone to meditate on a better conformation of...	1:27
4	<b>Chapter 34:</b> A Shoal of Barnacles	5:06
5	Clennam thought (and as he thought it, again felt ashamed of himself)...	6:47
6	There was Barnacle junior, also from the Circumlocution Office...	7:08
7	It was necessarily but a sprinkling of any class of Barnacles...	5:45
8	<b>Chapter 35:</b> What was behind Mr Pancks on Little Dorrit's Hand	6:56
9	This conversation took place in Clennam's bed-room...	6:18
10	As he kissed her, she turned her head towards his shoulder...	6:50
11	'Compose yourself, sir,' said Clennam...	6:53
12	This was the first intimation he had ever given...	6:29
13	<b>Chapter 36:</b> The Marshalsea becomes an Orphan	6:27

**Total time on CD 14: 78:59**

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## CD 15

1	He did not in person dine at this public repast...	6:59
2	In the yard, was the man with the shadowy grievance...	5:20
3	<b>BOOK THE SECOND:</b> Riches	6:29
	<b>Chapter 1:</b> Fellow Travellers	
4	While all this noise and hurry were rife among the living...	6:18
5	The elderly lady, who was a model of accurate dressing...	6:57
6	The head of the large retinue, who was gracious but not familiar...	6:10
7	He weightily communicated his opinion to their host...	7:15
8	There was a sorrowfully affectionate and regretful sound...	7:15
9	<b>Chapter 2:</b> Mrs General	6:18
10	Mrs General gravely inclined her head.	5:25
11	<b>Chapter 3:</b> On the Road	5:00
12	'Amy, my child,' said Mr Dorrit...	6:38
13	The entrance of the lady whom he announced...	2:30

**Total time on CD 15: 78:39**

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## CD 16

1	Her uncle was so far rescued from that shadow of old...	7:18
2	No one had interfered in the dispute...	6:47
3	Sitting opposite her father in the travelling-carriage...	7:09
4	From these cities they would go on again...	4:33
5	<b>Chapter 4:</b> A Letter from Little Dorrit	5:43
6	When I go about here in a gondola...	3:09
7	<b>Chapter 5:</b> Something Wrong Somewhere	6:44
8	'There is no accounting,' said Mrs General, 'for these partialities.'	6:59
9	Mr Dorrit frowned, and looked anything but pleased.	6:38
10	There was a reproach in the touch so addressed to him...	6:17
11	Notwithstanding some objections from Miss Fanny...	6:59
12	Here Edward Dorrit, Esquire, eyed Miss Fanny...	4:54
13	As his hand went up above his head and came down on the table...	3:24

**Total time on CD 16: 76:41**

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## CD 17

1	<b>Chapter 6:</b> Something Right Somewhere	7:00
2	The features of the surrounding picture were, a church...	6:59
3	Blandois' hand was unsteady; but he laughed...	6:14
4	She lowered the window on her side...	7:11
5	However, as Miss Fanny called out with much concern...	6:26
6	The exquisitely bold and original thought presented itself...	3:45
7	<b>Chapter 7:</b> Mostly Prunes and Prism	6:51
8	Mrs General having long ago formed her own surface...	5:48
9	'You are very good,' said Gowan.	7:01
10	Little Dorrit had sometimes thought...	5:49
11	The bosom received this tribute in its most engaging manner.	2:05
12	<b>Chapter 8:</b> The Dowager Mrs Gowan is Reminded that it Never Does	7:39
13	Daniel Doyce was still reluctant to consent...	4:07

**Total time on CD 17: 77:00**

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## CD 18

1	He sadly and sorely missed Little Dorrit.	6:41
2	'And may I ask, ma'am,' retorted Mr Meagles...	6:17
3	Poor Mr Meagles looked aghast with astonishment.	5:32
4	<b>Chapter 9:</b> Appearance and Disappearance	6:37
5	On one of his visits Mrs Tickit received him with the words...	6:41
6	At that time the contrast was far greater...	6:52
7	After looking at the surrounding objects for assurance...	6:12
8	With those words and a parting glance, Flora bustled out...	7:09
9	His turning of his smooth thumbs over one another as he sat there...	4:39
10	<b>Chapter 10:</b> The Dreams of Mrs Flintwinch Thicken	6:57
11	He's not at home,' cried Affery.	6:32
12	While heaping these compliments on Mr Flintwinch...	5:50

**Total time on CD 18: 76:05**

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## CD 19

1	<b>Chapter 11:</b> A Letter from Little Dorrit	7:02
2	It was but yesterday, when I was there, that I saw Mr Meagles...	6:53
3	<b>Chapter 12:</b> In which a Great Patriotic Conference is Holden	6:30
4	Mr Merdle stood in one of his drawing-rooms...	6:23
5	With some of the Chorus, he laughed about the sleepy member...	6:08
6	It was a dinner to provoke an appetite, though he had not had one.	7:01
7	Mr Tite Barnacle's view of the business was of a less airy character.	6:52
8	Bar was a sight wondrous to behold, and full of matter...	5:14
9	<b>Chapter 13:</b> The Progress of an Epidemic	6:43
10	Mrs Plornish's shop-parlour had been decorated under her own eye...	6:20
11	After very anxious scrutiny, he came out of his retreat...	7:03
12	Arthur, with less formality, expressed himself gratified...	3:58

**Total time on CD 19: 76:13**

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## CD 20

1	A dinner of soup and a pigeon-pie, served on a little round table...	6:52
2	The positive refusal expressed in Mr Pancks's continued snorts...	5:41
3	<b>Chapter 14: Taking Advice</b>	6:11
4	At first, Fanny took this ill, too; protesting to her looking-glass...	6:07
5	'Dear Fanny, let me say first, that I would far rather we worked...'	7:02
6	There was yet another circumstance which went a long way to...	6:07
7	<b>Chapter 15: No Just Cause or Impediment Why These Two Persons Should Not be Joined Together</b>	6:39
8	Mr Dorrit threw in another compliment here...	6:59
9	In his execution of this mission Mr Tinkler perhaps expressed...	7:01
10	The winter passing on towards the spring...	6:05
11	After yielding herself up, in this pattern manner...	6:47
12	If Little Dorrit found herself left a little lonely and a little low...	7:16

**Total time on CD 20: 78:53**

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## CD 21

1	<b>Chapter 16:</b> Getting On	4:30
2	Mr Dorrit, dressing-gowned and newspapered, was at his breakfast.	6:29
3	Mr Dorrit laughed in the buoyancy of his spirit.	7:20
4	<b>Chapter 17:</b> Missing	6:59
5	'Allow me to ask, madam,' said Mr Dorrit...	7:02
6	A watch was evidently kept upon the place.	6:52
7	Disconcerted by the cold and hard inquiry...	3:37
8	<b>Chapter 18:</b> A Castle in the Air	7:09
9	Mr Dorrit was ashamed. He went back to the window...	6:22
10	His preoccupied face so clearly denoted the pursuit in which...	4:04
11	<b>Chapter 19:</b> The Storming of the Castle in the Air	6:08
12	She paused for an instant in her work to look at him...	6:28
13	All this happened now, for the first time since their accession to wealth.	4:25

**Total time on CD 21: 77:31**

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## CD 22

1	Mrs General sent up her compliments in good time next day...	7:01
2	On the return of that lady to tea...	6:48
3	'Ladies and gentlemen, God bless you all!'	7:04
4	They remained in a dim room near, until it was almost midnight...	2:27
5	<b>Chapter 20:</b> Introduces the Next	6:03
6	After some pause, a door of communication with...	6:43
7	She took her revenge for her old grudge in thus turning...	6:21
8	He was not going in the same breath...	4:36
9	<b>Chapter 21:</b> The History of a Self-Tormentor	6:57
10	I liked the children. They were timid...	6:01
11	He told me I did not do myself justice.	5:36
12	Other conversation followed...	3:15
13	<b>Chapter 22:</b> Who Passes by this Road so Late?	5:10
14	'And now,' said Daniel, looking at his watch...	3:28

**Total time on CD 22: 77:36**

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## CD 23

1	In the lull consequent on the departure...	4:48
2	Clennam fell back as if the word had struck him a blow...	3:13
3	<b>Chapter 23:</b> Mistress Affery Makes a Conditional Promise Respecting her Dreams	5:55
4	'You'll be able to take my likeness, the next time you call, Arthur...'	6:26
5	Arthur had no choice but to say that his informant had not...	6:48
6	Having paid the tribute of a sigh to the instability of human...	6:35
7	'Affery, I want to know what is amiss here...'	5:44
8	<b>Chapter 24:</b> The Evening of a Long Day	6:34
9	'My dear,' answered Mr Sparkler...	5:58
10	Mr Sparkler's sentiments as to the plan were, in brief...	6:35
11	When the candles were brought in, Mr Merdle was discovered...	7:21
12	<b>Chapter 25:</b> The Chief Butler Resigns the Seals of Office	6:28
13	'May I ask,' he said, 'is this true about Merdle?'	5:46

**Total time on CD 23: 78:14**

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## CD 24

1	Physician's knock astonished Bar...	6:26
2	By about eleven o'clock in the forenoon...	5:13
3	<b>Chapter 26:</b> Reaping the Whirlwind	7:01
4	Mr Pancks brought his friend and professional adviser, Mr Rugg...	7:09
5	To all this Clennam merely replied...	6:36
6	Arthur was sitting with his eyes fixed on the floor...	1:36
7	<b>Chapter 27:</b> The Pupil of the Marshalsea	6:51
8	Arthur looked at him for a moment in some wonder...	6:03
9	Young John was some time absent...	5:55
10	'It seems to me just possible,' said Arthur...	6:31
11	He did what he could to muster a smile...	6:28
12	It has been already stated that Mrs Plornish...	6:20

**Total time on CD 24: 72:15**

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## CD 25

1	<b>Chapter 28:</b> An Appearance in the Marshalsea	7:18
2	'If I could believe that,' said Clennam, 'it would be a dismal...'	6:30
3	Arthur's thoughts had once more wandered away to Little Dorrit...	5:40
4	Monsieur Rigaud, after frowning at him for a moment, laughed.	6:52
5	'To business,' he then continued.	7:41
6	When he had finished this epistle, Rigaud folded it and...	6:56
7	Stretching his body out on the only three chairs in the room...	6:25
8	<b>Chapter 29:</b> A Plea in the Marshalsea	5:31
9	It was not until he had delighted in them for some time...	7:05
10	As they sat side by side in the shadow of the wall, the shadow fell...	7:12
11	The bell began to ring, warning visitors to depart.	5:23

**Total time on CD 25: 72:38**

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## CD 26

1	<b>Chapter 30:</b> Closing In	5:53
2	Mr Pancks put his hair erect with a general aspect of confidence...	5:43
3	After gazing at her in silence, Mrs Clennam turned to Rigaud.	7:02
4	'Bah! Stop an instant! Let us advance by steps.'	6:37
5	Mistress Affery, fixedly attentive in the window-seat...	6:28
6	With the set expression of her face all torn away...	6:43
7	Many years had come and gone since she had had the free use...	7:36
8	Rigaud snapped his fingers tauntingly in her face.	7:04
9	Retiring before him with vicious counter-jerks of his own elbows...	7:35
10	'This box can never bring, elsewhere, the price it will bring here!'	6:01
11	<b>Chapter 31:</b> Closed	5:01
12	She stood at the window, bewildered...	4:16

**Total time on CD 26: 76:04**

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## CD 27

1	She stood in the shadow so that she was only a veiled form...	6:52
2	In the softened light of the window, looking from the scene...	6:35
3	Still, they had not come upon Flintwinch yet...	2:45
4	<b>Chapter 32:</b> Going	6:07
5	'Oh,' said Pancks. 'Anything more?'	5:41
6	Having taken this little liberty with the Patriarchal person...	6:39
7	The Last of the Patriarchs had been so seized by assault...	2:01
8	<b>Chapter 33:</b> Going!	6:33
9	By this time Mr Henry Gowan had made up his mind...	5:28
10	Without hoping that he or anybody else had been pretty well...	6:10
11	The faithful John was on duty when...	5:11
12	The secret was safe now!	6:17

**Total time on CD 27: 66:23**

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## CD 28

1	<b>Chapter 34:</b> Gone	7:14
2	'I have nothing in the world.'	6:33
3	Flora really had tears in her eyes now...	5:19
4	One morning, as Arthur listened for the light feet...	6:39
5	There was silence, which was not broken...	5:25
6	Little Dorrit's old friend held the inkstand as she signed her name...	2:25

**Total time on CD 28: 33:38**

**Total time on CDs 1–28: 35:04:15**

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# Charles Dickens

(1812–1870)

## Little Dorrit

Dickens was full of ideas for this, his eleventh novel, as he started work on it, and was convinced that he had a ‘capital name’ for it – *Nobody’s Fault*.

However, try as he might, he couldn’t settle to the writing of it: there were too many distractions. For instance, Dickens always loved amateur theatricals, and he was keen to produce and act in a new melodrama by his young friend Wilkie Collins called *The Lighthouse*, which was to be performed in the school-room at Tavistock House (Dickens’s home) by his family and friends. Dickens characteristically threw himself into every aspect of the production: scenery, special effects, lighting and, of course, his own full-blooded acting, which often reduced the audience to tears. Meanwhile the manuscript of his new novel lay untouched.

He took up the threads again in Folkestone, where he went for the summer

of 1855, seeking peace and quiet to concentrate on the book. The novel was taking a long time to take shape and Dickens was afraid he might be losing his imaginative powers. He was having difficulty finding a theme that would draw the book together.

Though he set the book in the 1820s, it was the issues of the 1850s he wished to address. The book’s origins are to be found in his disgust at the appalling administration of the Crimean War (1854–56). He made speeches against the Prime Minister Palmerston and his administration. Hundreds of British soldiers had died, not through the conflict of war, but through neglect and lack of essential supplies from the British Government. The original title *Nobody’s Fault* had become the official response to the disaster, and this was Dickens’s way of exposing the crippling bureaucracy and red tape that hampered

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the Civil Service and prevented Britain from becoming an efficient modern nation. The fictional Circumlocution Office was born:

It is true that How not to do it was the great study and object of all public departments and professional politicians all round the Circumlocution Office. It is true that every new premier and every new government, coming in because they had upheld a certain thing as necessary to be done, were no sooner come in than they applied their utmost faculties to discovering How not to do it.

The background theme of the novel is the atrophy of the British nation as the result of outmoded political institutions, and the apathy that breeds in a society which never moves forward. Over the whole book Dickens casts a dirty and dingy pall; the odour of decay pervades every character. Against this gloomy background, Dickens developed his narrative: the story of a middle-aged man (Arthur Clennam) who finds inspiration and escape from his own personal apathy in the simple but devoted

spirit of a young woman willing to serve and help others at the expense of herself. Dickens works hard to show that an inert society can be re-vitalised by the example of individuals: Doyce working single-handedly for the betterment of British industry and the conditions of the working-man; Mr Meagles's kindness and generosity of spirit; Pancks rebelling finally against the rent-racketeer Casby; and Little Dorrit herself, of course. So important did this young woman – born in the Marshalsea itself – become, that Dickens changed the title of the book to *Little Dorrit*, though 'Nobody's Fault' is heard as the recurring cry throughout the book.

Dickens's restless energy, which he had displayed in Collins's amateur theatricals, continued throughout his creation of the novel. For instance, the latter part was completed during a prolonged stay in Paris. 'One is driven by an irresistible might until the journey is worked out! It is much better to go on and fret than stop and fret,' he wrote manically to his friend Forster at this time. It shows how closely he associated himself with the theme of his novel: action rather than atrophy. To be continually on the move avoids the inevitable – becoming a prisoner of one's own personality and past –

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and Dickens was a man haunted by his past.

As with his other novels, Dickens could not help drawing on his own eventful life when creating the characters and narrative of *Little Dorrit*. The sombre shadow of the Marshalsea Prison looms over the whole book, and is a testament to the deep effect the place had on Dickens as a child, when his own father John Dickens was imprisoned there for debt. Mr Dorrit, the Father of the Marshalsea, is based on Dickens's insolvent father. He had presented an affectionate and humorous portrait of him before, in the character of Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield*, but in *Mr. Dorrit*, Dickens shows his father's darker side:

Crushed at first by his imprisonment, he had soon found a dull relief in it. He was under lock and key; but the lock and key that kept him in, kept numbers of his troubles out. If he had been a man with strength of purpose to face those troubles and fight them, he might have broken the net that held him, or broken his heart; but, being what he was, he languidly slipped into this smooth descent, and never more took one step upward.

Through his father's fecklessness young Dickens became very familiar with the Marshalsea and it is in the detailed descriptions of the prison's interior that he reveals to us the misery indelibly stamped on his youthful consciousness. 'The walls and ceiling were blackened with flies,' he remembers, and later recalls a child's fancy gazing on the harsh prison walls: 'Many combinations did those spikes upon the wall assume, many light shapes did the strong iron weave itself into, many golden touches fell upon the rust, while Little Dorrit sat there musing. New zigzags sprung into the cruel pattern sometimes, when she saw it through a burst of tears...'

Flora Finching, the first love of Arthur Clennam, is a fictional portrait of Dickens's own first love Maria Beadnell, whom he met twenty years after their youthful romance, and who had, like Arthur's sweetheart, 'blossomed' in the intervening years: 'Flora, always tall, had grown to be very broad too, and short of breath; but that was not much. Flora whom he had left a lily, had become a peony; but that was not much. Flora who had seemed enchanting in all she said and thought, was diffuse and silly. That was much. Flora, who had been spoiled

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and artless long ago, was determined to be spoiled and artless now. That was a fatal blow.'

In *Flora Finching*, Dickens creates one of his most humorous characters, despite being bitterly disillusioned by the changes he saw in Maria, Flora's original. For like Flora, she was a prisoner to her youthful self.

In a sense, every character in this book is a prisoner of him or her self. There is a long chain of prisoners who in their turn imprison those nearest to them. Dorrit suppresses the freedom of Little Dorrit by relying on her for everything; even the great Mr Merdle is a prisoner of the very society he has helped, as a great financier, to perpetuate. He escapes through suicide, when it is revealed that he 'was simply the greatest forger and the greatest thief that ever cheated the galleys'. Merdle's fall brings about Arthur Clennam's, who had invested with him. Arthur, the self-deprecating hero of the novel, is another man trapped within himself. He is dominated by Mrs Clennam. His youth was destroyed by her perverted religion and his young manhood wasted working in the stultifying family business abroad. He returns to England an empty

submissive shell; all spontaneity gone. He has not the spirit to propose to Pet, the beautiful daughter of Mr Meagles, and is unaware of the love of Little Dorrit until the end of the book.

The inhabitants of Bleeding-Heart Yard are in their turn imprisoned by poverty, crippling low wages and extortionate rents. They cannot escape the treadmill of mindless drudgery, or soul-destroying unemployment. Whose fault is it? Nobody's, is the general conclusion once again. Rents charged on people with no means to pay is one of the curses of capitalism, and Dickens's exposure of this oppressive system in the 1850s, though stopping short of demanding the reform of society itself, laid a foundation on which Karl Marx could draw for his socialist writings of the 1860s. Instead, Dickens, as a creative writer, chose to side-step politics and be true to humanity. He sends Arthur and Little Dorrit out into the world to *endure* its realities, and not to change it. They will live a good and uneventful existence where whatever happens will be, in their eyes, ultimately – nobody's fault.

**Notes by David Timson**



One of Britain's leading classical actors, **Anton Lesser** has worked extensively at the National Theatre, and is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company, where, over the years, he has played many of the principal roles, including Romeo, Troilus, Petruchio and Richard III. His many television appearances include roles in *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife*, *Vanity Fair*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Dickens*. Films in which he has appeared include *Charlotte Gray*, *Fairytale – A True Story*, *Imagining Argentina*, *River Queen*, and most recently, *Miss Potter*. A familiar voice on radio, he has been involved in countless plays and recordings, and has become particularly associated with his award winning readings of Dickens for Naxos AudioBooks.

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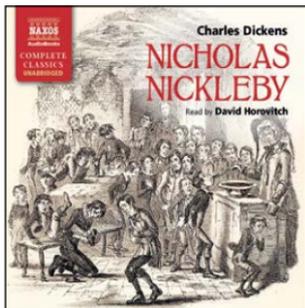
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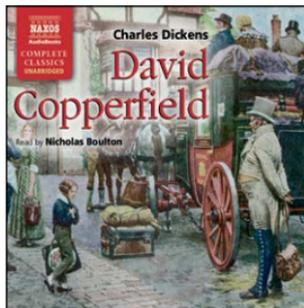
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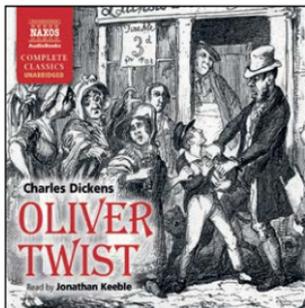
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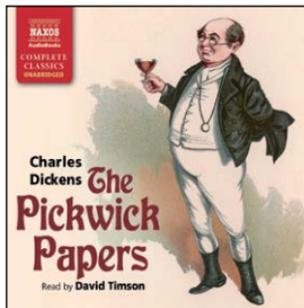
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