Chapter IX - Signs and Tokens

I don't know how it is I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think about myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story again, I am really vexed and say, 'Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature, I wish you wouldn't!' but it is all of no use. I hope any one who may read what I write will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them and can't be kept out. My darling and I read together, and worked, and practised, and found so much employment for our time that the winter days flew by us like bright-winged birds. Generally in the afternoons, and always in the evenings, Richard gave us his company. Although he was one of the most restless creatures in the world, he certainly was very fond of our society.

He was very, very, very fond of Ada. I mean it, and I had better say it at once. I had never seen any young people falling in love before, but I found them out quite soon. I could not say so, of course, or show that I knew anything about it. On the contrary, I was so demure and used to seem so unconscious that sometimes I considered within myself while I was sitting at work whether I was not growing quite deceitful.

But there was no help for it. All I had to do was to be quiet, and I was as quiet as a mouse. They were as quiet as mice too, so far as any words were concerned, but the innocent manner in which they relied more and more upon me as they took more and more to one another was so charming that I had great difficulty in not showing how it interested me.

'Our dear little old woman is such a capital old woman,' Richard would say, coming up to meet me in the garden early, with his pleasant laugh and perhaps the least tinge of a blush, 'that I can't get on without her. Before I begin my harum-scarum day-- grinding away at those books and instruments and then galloping up hill and down dale, all the country round, like a highwayman--it does me so much good to come and have a steady walk with our comfortable friend, that here I am again!'

'You know, Dame Durden, dear,' Ada would say at night, with her head upon my shoulder and the firelight shining in her thoughtful eyes, 'I don't want to talk when we come upstairs here. Only to sit a little while thinking, with your dear face for company, and to hear the wind and remember the poor sailors at sea--'

Ah! Perhaps Richard was going to be a sailor. We had talked it over very often now, and there was some talk of gratifying the inclination of

his childhood for the sea. Mr Jarndyce had written to a relation of the family, a great Sir Leicester Dedlock, for his interest in Richard's favour, generally; and Sir Leicester had replied in a gracious manner that he would be happy to advance the prospects of the young gentleman if it should ever prove to be within his power, which was not at all probable, and that my Lady sent her compliments to the young gentleman (to whom she perfectly remembered that she was allied by remote consanguinity) and trusted that he would ever do his duty in any honourable profession to which he might devote himself.

'So I apprehend it's pretty clear,' said Richard to me, 'that I shall have to work my own way. Never mind! Plenty of people have had to do that before now, and have done it. I only wish I had the command of a clipping privateer to begin with and could carry off the Chancellor and keep him on short allowance until he gave judgment in our cause. He'd find himself growing thin, if he didn't look sharp!'

With a buoyancy and hopefulness and a gaiety that hardly ever flagged, Richard had a carelessness in his character that quite perplexed me, principally because he mistook it, in such a very odd way, for prudence. It entered into all his calculations about money in a singular manner which I don't think I can better explain than by reverting for a moment to our loan to Mr Skimpole.

Mr Jarndyce had ascertained the amount, either from Mr Skimpole himself or from Coavinses, and had placed the money in my hands with instructions to me to retain my own part of it and hand the rest to Richard. The number of little acts of thoughtless expenditure which Richard justified by the recovery of his ten pounds, and the number of times he talked to me as if he had saved or realized that amount, would form a sum in simple addition.

'My prudent Mother Hubbard, why not?' he said to me when he wanted, without the least consideration, to bestow five pounds on the brickmaker. 'I made ten pounds, clear, out of Coavinses' business.'

'How was that?' said I.

'Why, I got rid of ten pounds which I was quite content to get rid of and never expected to see any more. You don't deny that?'

'No,' said I.

'Very well! Then I came into possession of ten pounds--'

'The same ten pounds,' I hinted.

‘That has nothing to do with it!’ returned Richard. ‘I have got ten pounds more than I expected to have, and consequently I can afford to spend it without being particular.’

In exactly the same way, when he was persuaded out of the sacrifice of these five pounds by being convinced that it would do no good, he carried that sum to his credit and drew upon it. ‘Let me see!’ he would say. ‘I saved five pounds out of the brickmaker's affair, so if I have a good rattle to London and back in a post-chaise and put that down at four pounds, I shall have saved one. And it's a very good thing to save one, let me tell you: a penny saved is a penny got!’

I believe Richard's was as frank and generous a nature as there possibly can be. He was ardent and brave, and in the midst of all his wild restlessness, was so gentle that I knew him like a brother in a few weeks. His gentleness was natural to him and would have shown itself abundantly even without Ada's influence; but with it, he became one of the most winning of companions, always so ready to be interested and always so happy, sanguine, and light-hearted. I am sure that I, sitting with them, and walking with them, and talking with them, and noticing from day to day how they went on, falling deeper and deeper in love, and saying nothing about it, and each shyly thinking that this love was the greatest of secrets, perhaps not yet suspected even by the other--I am sure that I was scarcely less enchanted than they were and scarcely less pleased with the pretty dream.

We were going on in this way, when one morning at breakfast Mr Jarndyce received a letter, and looking at the superscription, said, ‘From Boythorn? Aye, aye!’ and opened and read it with evident pleasure, announcing to us in a parenthesis when he was about half-way through, that Boythorn was ‘coming down’ on a visit. Now who was Boythorn, we all thought. And I dare say we all thought too--I am sure I did, for one--would Boythorn at all interfere with what was going forward?

‘I went to school with this fellow, Lawrence Boythorn,’ said Mr Jarndyce, tapping the letter as he laid it on the table, ‘more than five and forty years ago. He was then the most impetuous boy in the world, and he is now the most impetuous man. He was then the loudest boy in the world, and he is now the loudest man. He was then the heartiest and sturdiest boy in the world, and he is now the heartiest and sturdiest man. He is a tremendous fellow.’

‘In stature, sir?’ asked Richard.

‘Pretty well, Rick, in that respect,’ said Mr Jarndyce; ‘being some ten years older than I and a couple of inches taller, with his head thrown back like an old soldier, his stalwart chest squared, his hands like a

clean blacksmith's, and his lungs! There's no simile for his lungs. Talking, laughing, or snoring, they make the beams of the house shake.'

As Mr Jarndyce sat enjoying the image of his friend Boythorn, we observed the favourable omen that there was not the least indication of any change in the wind.

'But it's the inside of the man, the warm heart of the man, the passion of the man, the fresh blood of the man, Rick--and Ada, and little Cobweb too, for you are all interested in a visitor--that I speak of,' he pursued. 'His language is as sounding as his voice. He is always in extremes, perpetually in the superlative degree. In his condemnation he is all ferocity. You might suppose him to be an ogre from what he says, and I believe he has the reputation of one with some people. There! I tell you no more of him beforehand. You must not be surprised to see him take me under his protection, for he has never forgotten that I was a low boy at school and that our friendship began in his knocking two of my head tyrant's teeth out (he says six) before breakfast. Boythorn and his man,' to me, 'will be here this afternoon, my dear.'

I took care that the necessary preparations were made for Mr Boythorn's reception, and we looked forward to his arrival with some curiosity. The afternoon wore away, however, and he did not appear. The dinner-hour arrived, and still he did not appear. The dinner was put back an hour, and we were sitting round the fire with no light but the blaze when the hall-door suddenly burst open and the hall resounded with these words, uttered with the greatest vehemence and in a stentorian tone: 'We have been misdirected, Jarndyce, by a most abandoned ruffian, who told us to take the turning to the right instead of to the left. He is the most intolerable scoundrel on the face of the earth. His father must have been a most consummate villain, ever to have such a son. I would have had that fellow shot without the least remorse!'

'Did he do it on purpose?' Mr Jarndyce inquired.

'I have not the slightest doubt that the scoundrel has passed his whole existence in misdirecting travellers!' returned the other. 'By my soul, I thought him the worst-looking dog I had ever beheld when he was telling me to take the turning to the right. And yet I stood before that fellow face to face and didn't knock his brains out!'

'Teeth, you mean?' said Mr Jarndyce.

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Mr Lawrence Boythorn, really making the whole house vibrate. 'What, you have not forgotten it yet! Ha, ha, ha! And

that was another most consummate vagabond! By my soul, the countenance of that fellow when he was a boy was the blackest image of perfidy, cowardice, and cruelty ever set up as a scarecrow in a field of scoundrels. If I were to meet that most unparalleled despot in the streets to-morrow, I would fell him like a rotten tree!'

'I have no doubt of it,' said Mr Jarndyce. 'Now, will you come upstairs?'

'By my soul, Jarndyce,' returned his guest, who seemed to refer to his watch, 'if you had been married, I would have turned back at the garden-gate and gone away to the remotest summits of the Himalaya Mountains sooner than I would have presented myself at this unseasonable hour.'

'Not quite so far, I hope?' said Mr Jarndyce.

'By my life and honour, yes!' cried the visitor. 'I wouldn't be guilty of the audacious insolence of keeping a lady of the house waiting all this time for any earthly consideration. I would infinitely rather destroy myself--infinitely rather!'

Talking thus, they went upstairs, and presently we heard him in his bedroom thundering 'Ha, ha, ha!' and again 'Ha, ha, ha!' until the flattest echo in the neighbourhood seemed to catch the contagion and to laugh as enjoyingly as he did or as we did when we heard him laugh.

We all conceived a prepossession in his favour, for there was a sterling quality in this laugh, and in his vigorous, healthy voice, and in the roundness and fullness with which he uttered every word he spoke, and in the very fury of his superlatives, which seemed to go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing. But we were hardly prepared to have it so confirmed by his appearance when Mr Jarndyce presented him. He was not only a very handsome old gentleman--upright and stalwart as he had been described to us-- with a massive grey head, a fine composure of face when silent, a figure that might have become corpulent but for his being so continually in earnest that he gave it no rest, and a chin that might have subsided into a double chin but for the vehement emphasis in which it was constantly required to assist; but he was such a true gentleman in his manner, so chivalrously polite, his face was lighted by a smile of so much sweetness and tenderness, and it seemed so plain that he had nothing to hide, but showed himself exactly as he was--incapable, as Richard said, of anything on a limited scale, and firing away with those blank great guns because he carried no small arms whatever--that really I could not help looking at him with equal pleasure as he sat at dinner, whether he smilingly conversed with Ada and me, or was led by Mr

Jarndyce into some great volley of superlatives, or threw up his head like a bloodhound and gave out that tremendous 'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You have brought your bird with you, I suppose?' said Mr Jarndyce.

'By heaven, he is the most astonishing bird in Europe!' replied the other. 'He IS the most wonderful creature! I wouldn't take ten thousand guineas for that bird. I have left an annuity for his sole support in case he should outlive me. He is, in sense and attachment, a phenomenon. And his father before him was one of the most astonishing birds that ever lived!'

The subject of this laudation was a very little canary, who was so tame that he was brought down by Mr Boythorn's man, on his forefinger, and after taking a gentle flight round the room, alighted on his master's head. To hear Mr Boythorn presently expressing the most implacable and passionate sentiments, with this fragile mite of a creature quietly perched on his forehead, was to have a good illustration of his character, I thought.

'By my soul, Jarndyce,' he said, very gently holding up a bit of bread to the canary to peck at, 'if I were in your place I would seize every master in Chancery by the throat to-morrow morning and shake him until his money rolled out of his pockets and his bones rattled in his skin. I would have a settlement out of somebody, by fair means or by foul. If you would empower me to do it, I would do it for you with the greatest satisfaction!' (All this time the very small canary was eating out of his hand.)

'I thank you, Lawrence, but the suit is hardly at such a point at present,' returned Mr Jarndyce, laughing, 'that it would be greatly advanced even by the legal process of shaking the bench and the whole bar.'

'There never was such an infernal cauldron as that Chancery on the face of the earth!' said Mr Boythorn. 'Nothing but a mine below it on a busy day in term time, with all its records, rules, and precedents collected in it and every functionary belonging to it also, high and low, upward and downward, from its son the Accountant-General to its father the Devil, and the whole blown to atoms with ten thousand hundredweight of gunpowder, would reform it in the least!'

It was impossible not to laugh at the energetic gravity with which he recommended this strong measure of reform. When we laughed, he threw up his head and shook his broad chest, and again the whole country seemed to echo to his 'Ha, ha, ha!' It had not the least effect in disturbing the bird, whose sense of security was complete and who hopped about the table with its quick head now on this side and now

on that, turning its bright sudden eye on its master as if he were no more than another bird.

'But how do you and your neighbour get on about the disputed right of way?' said Mr Jarndyce. 'You are not free from the toils of the law yourself!'

'The fellow has brought actions against ME for trespass, and I have brought actions against HIM for trespass,' returned Mr Boythorn. 'By heaven, he is the proudest fellow breathing. It is morally impossible that his name can be Sir Leicester. It must be Sir Lucifer.'

'Complimentary to our distant relation!' said my guardian laughingly to Ada and Richard.

'I would beg Miss Clare's pardon and Mr Carstone's pardon,' resumed our visitor, 'if I were not reassured by seeing in the fair face of the lady and the smile of the gentleman that it is quite unnecessary and that they keep their distant relation at a comfortable distance.'

'Or he keeps us,' suggested Richard.

'By my soul,' exclaimed Mr Boythorn, suddenly firing another volley, 'that fellow is, and his father was, and his grandfather was, the most stiff-necked, arrogant imbecile, pig-headed numskull, ever, by some inexplicable mistake of Nature, born in any station of life but a walking-stick's! The whole of that family are the most solemnly conceited and consummate blockheads! But it's no matter; he should not shut up my path if he were fifty baronets melted into one and living in a hundred Chesney Wolds, one within another, like the ivory balls in a Chinese carving. The fellow, by his agent, or secretary, or somebody, writes to me 'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, presents his compliments to Mr Lawrence Boythorn, and has to call his attention to the fact that the green pathway by the old parsonage-house, now the property of Mr Lawrence Boythorn, is Sir Leicester's right of way, being in fact a portion of the park of chesney Wold, and that Sir Leicester finds it convenient to close up the same.' I write to the fellow, 'Mr Lawrence Boythorn presents his compliments to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and has to call HIS attention to the fact that he totally denies the whole of Sir Leicester Dedlock's positions on every possible subject and has to add, in reference to closing up the pathway, that he will be glad to see the man who may undertake to do it.' The fellow sends a most abandoned villain with one eye to construct a gateway. I play upon that execrable scoundrel with a fire-engine until the breath is nearly driven out of his body. The fellow erects a gate in the night. I chop it down and burn it in the morning. He sends his myrmidons to come over the fence and pass and repass. I catch them in humane man traps, fire split peas at their legs, play

upon them with the engine--resolve to free mankind from the insupportable burden of the existence of those lurking ruffians. He brings actions for trespass; I bring actions for trespass. He brings actions for assault and battery; I defend them and continue to assault and batter. Ha, ha, ha!'

To hear him say all this with unimaginable energy, one might have thought him the angriest of mankind. To see him at the very same time, looking at the bird now perched upon his thumb and softly smoothing its feathers with his forefinger, one might have thought him the gentlest. To hear him laugh and see the broad good nature of his face then, one might have supposed that he had not a care in the world, or a dispute, or a dislike, but that his whole existence was a summer joke.

'No, no,' he said, 'no closing up of my paths by any Dedlock! Though I willingly confess,' here he softened in a moment, 'that Lady Dedlock is the most accomplished lady in the world, to whom I would do any homage that a plain gentleman, and no baronet with a head seven hundred years thick, may. A man who joined his regiment at twenty and within a week challenged the most imperious and presumptuous coxcomb of a commanding officer that ever drew the breath of life through a tight waist--and got broke for it--is not the man to be walked over by all the Sir Lucifers, dead or alive, locked or unlocked. Ha, ha, ha!'

'Nor the man to allow his junior to be walked over either?' said my guardian.

'Most assuredly not!' said Mr Boythorn, clapping him on the shoulder with an air of protection that had something serious in it, though he laughed. 'He will stand by the low boy, always. Jarndyce, you may rely upon him! But speaking of this trespass-- with apologies to Miss Clare and Miss Summerson for the length at which I have pursued so dry a subject--is there nothing for me from your men Kenge and Carboy?'

'I think not, Esther?' said Mr Jarndyce.

'Nothing, guardian.'

'Much obliged!' said Mr Boythorn. 'Had no need to ask, after even my slight experience of Miss Summerson's forethought for every one about her.' (They all encouraged me; they were determined to do it.) 'I inquired because, coming from Lincolnshire, I of course have not yet been in town, and I thought some letters might have been sent down here. I dare say they will report progress to- morrow morning.'

I saw him so often in the course of the evening, which passed very pleasantly, contemplate Richard and Ada with an interest and a satisfaction that made his fine face remarkably agreeable as he sat at a little distance from the piano listening to the music--and he had small occasion to tell us that he was passionately fond of music, for his face showed it--that I asked my guardian as we sat at the backgammon board whether Mr Boythorn had ever been married.

'No,' said he. 'No.'

'But he meant to be!' said I.

'How did you find out that?' he returned with a smile. 'Why, guardian,' I explained, not without reddening a little at hazarding what was in my thoughts, 'there is something so tender in his manner, after all, and he is so very courtly and gentle to us, and --'

Mr Jarndyce directed his eyes to where he was sitting as I have just described him.

I said no more.

'You are right, little woman,' he answered. 'He was all but married once. Long ago. And once.'

'Did the lady die?'

'No--but she died to him. That time has had its influence on all his later life. Would you suppose him to have a head and a heart full of romance yet?'

'I think, guardian, I might have supposed so. But it is easy to say that when you have told me so.'

'He has never since been what he might have been,' said Mr Jarndyce, 'and now you see him in his age with no one near him but his servant and his little yellow friend. It's your throw, my dear!'

I felt, from my guardian's manner, that beyond this point I could not pursue the subject without changing the wind. I therefore forbore to ask any further questions. I was interested, but not curious. I thought a little while about this old love story in the night, when I was awakened by Mr Boythorn's lusty snoring; and I tried to do that very difficult thing, imagine old people young again and invested with the graces of youth. But I fell asleep before I had succeeded, and dreamed of the days when I lived in my godmother's house. I am not sufficiently acquainted with such subjects to know whether it is at all remarkable that I almost always dreamed of that period of my life.

With the morning there came a letter from Messrs. Kenge and Carboy to Mr Boythorn informing him that one of their clerks would wait upon him at noon. As it was the day of the week on which I paid the bills, and added up my books, and made all the household affairs as compact as possible, I remained at home while Mr Jarndyce, Ada, and Richard took advantage of a very fine day to make a little excursion, Mr Boythorn was to wait for Kenge and Carboy's clerk and then was to go on foot to meet them on their return.

Well! I was full of business, examining tradesmen's books, adding up columns, paying money, filing receipts, and I dare say making a great bustle about it when Mr Guppy was announced and shown in. I had had some idea that the clerk who was to be sent down might be the young gentleman who had met me at the coach-office, and I was glad to see him, because he was associated with my present happiness.

I scarcely knew him again, he was so uncommonly smart. He had an entirely new suit of glossy clothes on, a shining hat, lilac-kid gloves, a neckerchief of a variety of colours, a large hot-house flower in his button-hole, and a thick gold ring on his little finger. Besides which, he quite scented the dining-room with bear's-grease and other perfumery. He looked at me with an attention that quite confused me when I begged him to take a seat until the servant should return; and as he sat there crossing and uncrossing his legs in a corner, and I asked him if he had had a pleasant ride, and hoped that Mr Kenge was well, I never looked at him, but I found him looking at me in the same scrutinizing and curious way.

When the request was brought to him that he would go upstairs to Mr Boythorn's room, I mentioned that he would find lunch prepared for him when he came down, of which Mr Jarndyce hoped he would partake. He said with some embarrassment, holding the handle of the door, ‘Shall I have the honour of finding you here, miss?’ I replied yes, I should be there; and he went out with a bow and another look.

I thought him only awkward and shy, for he was evidently much embarrassed; and I fancied that the best thing I could do would be to wait until I saw that he had everything he wanted and then to leave him to himself. The lunch was soon brought, but it remained for some time on the table. The interview with Mr Boythorn was a long one, and a stormy one too, I should think, for although his room was at some distance I heard his loud voice rising every now and then like a high wind, and evidently blowing perfect broadsides of denunciation.

At last Mr Guppy came back, looking something the worse for the conference. ‘My eye, miss,’ he said in a low voice, ‘he's a Tartar!’

‘Pray take some refreshment, sir,’ said I.

Mr Guppy sat down at the table and began nervously sharpening the carving-knife on the carving-fork, still looking at me (as I felt quite sure without looking at him) in the same unusual manner. The sharpening lasted so long that at last I felt a kind of obligation on me to raise my eyes in order that I might break the spell under which he seemed to labour, of not being able to leave off.

He immediately looked at the dish and began to carve.

'What will you take yourself, miss? You'll take a morsel of something?'

'No, thank you,' said I.

'Shan't I give you a piece of anything at all, miss?' said Mr Guppy, hurriedly drinking off a glass of wine.

'Nothing, thank you,' said I. 'I have only waited to see that you have everything you want. Is there anything I can order for you?'

'No, I am much obliged to you, miss, I'm sure. I've everything that I can require to make me comfortable--at least I--not comfortable-- I'm never that.' He drank off two more glasses of wine, one after another.

I thought I had better go.

'I beg your pardon, miss!' said Mr Guppy, rising when he saw me rise. 'But would you allow me the favour of a minute's private conversation?'

Not knowing what to say, I sat down again.

'What follows is without prejudice, miss?' said Mr Guppy, anxiously bringing a chair towards my table.

'I don't understand what you mean,' said I, wondering.

'It's one of our law terms, miss. You won't make any use of it to my detriment at Kenge and Carboy's or elsewhere. If our conversation shouldn't lead to anything, I am to be as I was and am not to be prejudiced in my situation or worldly prospects. In short, it's in total confidence.'

'I am at a loss, sir,' said I, 'to imagine what you can have to communicate in total confidence to me, whom you have never seen but once; but I should be very sorry to do you any injury.'

'Thank you, miss. I'm sure of it--that's quite sufficient.' All this time Mr Guppy was either planing his forehead with his handkerchief or

tightly rubbing the palm of his left hand with the palm of his right. 'If you would excuse my taking another glass of wine, miss, I think it might assist me in getting on without a continual choke that cannot fail to be mutually unpleasant.'

He did so, and came back again. I took the opportunity of moving well behind my table.

'You wouldn't allow me to offer you one, would you miss?' said Mr Guppy, apparently refreshed.

'Not any,' said I.

'Not half a glass?' said Mr Guppy. 'Quarter? No! Then, to proceed. My present salary, Miss Summerson, at Kenge and Carboy's, is two pound a week. When I first had the happiness of looking upon you, it was one fifteen, and had stood at that figure for a lengthened period. A rise of five has since taken place, and a further rise of five is guaranteed at the expiration of a term not exceeding twelve months from the present date. My mother has a little property, which takes the form of a small life annuity, upon which she lives in an independent though unassuming manner in the Old Street Road. She is eminently calculated for a mother-in-law. She never interferes, is all for peace, and her disposition easy. She has her failings--as who has not?--but I never knew her do it when company was present, at which time you may freely trust her with wines, spirits, or malt liquors. My own abode is lodgings at Penton Place, Pentonville. It is lowly, but airy, open at the back, and considered one of the 'ealthiest outlets. Miss Summerson! In the mildest language, I adore you. Would you be so kind as to allow me (as I may say) to file a declaration--to make an offer!'

Mr Guppy went down on his knees. I was well behind my table and not much frightened. I said, 'Get up from that ridiculous position immediately, sir, or you will oblige me to break my implied promise and ring the bell!'

'Hear me out, miss!' said Mr Guppy, folding his hands.

'I cannot consent to hear another word, sir,' I returned, 'Unless you get up from the carpet directly and go and sit down at the table as you ought to do if you have any sense at all.'

He looked piteously, but slowly rose and did so.

'Yet what a mockery it is, miss,' he said with his hand upon his heart and shaking his head at me in a melancholy manner over the tray, 'to

be stationed behind food at such a moment. The soul recoils from food at such a moment, miss.'

'I beg you to conclude,' said I; 'you have asked me to hear you out, and I beg you to conclude.'

'I will, miss,' said Mr Guppy. 'As I love and honour, so likewise I obey. Would that I could make thee the subject of that vow before the shrine!'

'That is quite impossible,' said I, 'and entirely out of the question.'

'I am aware,' said Mr Guppy, leaning forward over the tray and regarding me, as I again strangely felt, though my eyes were not directed to him, with his late intent look, 'I am aware that in a worldly point of view, according to all appearances, my offer is a poor one. But, Miss Summerson! Angel! No, don't ring--I have been brought up in a sharp school and am accustomed to a variety of general practice. Though a young man, I have ferreted out evidence, got up cases, and seen lots of life. Blest with your hand, what means might I not find of advancing your interests and pushing your fortunes! What might I not get to know, nearly concerning you? I know nothing now, certainly; but what MIGHT I not if I had your confidence, and you set me on?'

I told him that he addressed my interest or what he supposed to be my interest quite as unsuccessfully as he addressed my inclination, and he would now understand that I requested him, if he pleased, to go away immediately.

'Cruel miss,' said Mr Guppy, 'hear but another word! I think you must have seen that I was struck with those charms on the day when I waited at the Whytorseller. I think you must have remarked that I could not forbear a tribute to those charms when I put up the steps of the 'ackney-coach. It was a feeble tribute to thee, but it was well meant. Thy image has ever since been fixed in my breast. I have walked up and down of an evening opposite Jellyby's house only to look upon the bricks that once contained thee. This out of to- day, quite an unnecessary out so far as the attendance, which was its pretended object, went, was planned by me alone for thee alone. If I speak of interest, it is only to recommend myself and my respectful wretchedness. Love was before it, and is before it.'

'I should be pained, Mr Guppy,' said I, rising and putting my hand upon the bell-rope, 'to do you or any one who was sincere the injustice of slighting any honest feeling, however disagreeably expressed. If you have really meant to give me a proof of your good opinion, though ill-timed and misplaced, I feel that I ought to thank you. I have very little reason to be proud, and I am not proud. I hope,' I think I added,

without very well knowing what I said, 'that you will now go away as if you had never been so exceedingly foolish and attend to Messrs. Kenge and Carboy's business.'

'Half a minute, miss!' cried Mr Guppy, checking me as I was about to ring. 'This has been without prejudice?'

'I will never mention it,' said I, 'unless you should give me future occasion to do so.'

'A quarter of a minute, miss! In case you should think better at any time, however distant--THAT'S no consequence, for my feelings can never alter--of anything I have said, particularly what might I not do, Mr William Guppy, eighty-seven, Penton Place, or if removed, or dead (of blighted hopes or anything of that sort), care of Mrs Guppy, three hundred and two, Old Street Road, will be sufficient.'

I rang the bell, the servant came, and Mr Guppy, laying his written card upon the table and making a dejected bow, departed. Raising my eyes as he went out, I once more saw him looking at me after he had passed the door.

I sat there for another hour or more, finishing my books and payments and getting through plenty of business. Then I arranged my desk, and put everything away, and was so composed and cheerful that I thought I had quite dismissed this unexpected incident. But, when I went upstairs to my own room, I surprised myself by beginning to laugh about it and then surprised myself still more by beginning to cry about it. In short, I was in a flutter for a little while and felt as if an old chord had been more coarsely touched than it ever had been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden.