Chapter XIII - Esther's Narrative

We held many consultations about what Richard was to be, first without Mr Jarndyce, as he had requested, and afterwards with him, but it was a long time before we seemed to make progress. Richard said he was ready for anything. When Mr Jarndyce doubted whether he might not already be too old to enter the Navy, Richard said he had thought of that, and perhaps he was. When Mr Jarndyce asked him what he thought of the Army, Richard said he had thought of that, too, and it wasn't a bad idea. When Mr Jarndyce advised him to try and decide within himself whether his old preference for the sea was an ordinary boyish inclination or a strong impulse, Richard answered, Well he really HAD tried very often, and he couldn't make out.

'How much of this indecision of character,' Mr Jarndyce said to me, 'is chargeable on that incomprehensible heap of uncertainty and procrastination on which he has been thrown from his birth, I don't pretend to say; but that Chancery, among its other sins, is responsible for some of it, I can plainly see. It has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off--and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance--and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused. The character of much older and steadier people may be even changed by the circumstances surrounding them. It would be too much to expect that a boy's, in its formation, should be the subject of such influences and escape them.'

I felt this to be true; though if I may venture to mention what I thought besides, I thought it much to be regretted that Richard's education had not counteracted those influences or directed his character. He had been eight years at a public school and had learnt, I understood, to make Latin verses of several sorts in the most admirable manner. But I never heard that it had been anybody's business to find out what his natural bent was, or where his failings lay, or to adapt any kind of knowledge to HIM. HE had been adapted to the verses and had learnt the art of making them to such perfection that if he had remained at school until he was of age, I suppose he could only have gone on making them over and over again unless he had enlarged his education by forgetting how to do it. Still, although I had no doubt that they were very beautiful, and very improving, and very sufficient for a great many purposes of life, and always remembered all through life, I did doubt whether Richard would not have profited by some one studying him a little, instead of his studying them quite so much.

To be sure, I knew nothing of the subject and do not even now know whether the young gentlemen of classic Rome or Greece made verses to the same extent--or whether the young gentlemen of any country ever did.

'I haven't the least idea,' said Richard, musing, 'what I had better be. Except that I am quite sure I don't want to go into the Church, it's a toss-up.'

'You have no inclination in Mr Kenge's way?' suggested Mr Jarndyce.

'I don't know that, sir!' replied Richard. 'I am fond of boating. Articled clerks go a good deal on the water. It's a capital profession!'

'Surgeon--' suggested Mr Jarndyce.

'That's the thing, sir!' cried Richard.

I doubt if he had ever once thought of it before.

'That's the thing, sir,' repeated Richard with the greatest enthusiasm. 'We have got it at last. M.R.C.S.!'

He was not to be laughed out of it, though he laughed at it heartily. He said he had chosen his profession, and the more he thought of it, the more he felt that his destiny was clear; the art of healing was the art of all others for him. Mistrusting that he only came to this conclusion because, having never had much chance of finding out for himself what he was fitted for and having never been guided to the discovery, he was taken by the newest idea and was glad to get rid of the trouble of consideration, I wondered whether the Latin verses often ended in this or whether Richard's was a solitary case.

Mr Jarndyce took great pains to talk with him seriously and to put it to his good sense not to deceive himself in so important a matter. Richard was a little grave after these interviews, but invariably told Ada and me that it was all right, and then began to talk about something else.

'By heaven!' cried Mr Boythorn, who interested himself strongly in the subject--though I need not say that, for he could do nothing weakly; 'I rejoice to find a young gentleman of spirit and gallantry devoting himself to that noble profession! The more spirit there is in it, the better for mankind and the worse for those mercenary task-masters and low tricksters who delight in putting that illustrious art at a disadvantage in the world. By all that is base and despicable,' cried Mr Boythorn, 'the treatment of surgeons aboard ship is such that I would submit the legs--both legs--of every member of the Admiralty Board to a compound fracture and render it a transportable offence in any qualified practitioner to set them if the system were not wholly changed in eight and forty hours!'

'Wouldn't you give them a week?' asked Mr Jarndyce.

'No!' cried Mr Boythorn firmly. 'Not on any consideration! Eight and forty hours! As to corporations, parishes, vestry-boards, and similar gatherings of jolter-headed clods who assemble to exchange such speeches that, by heaven, they ought to be worked in quicksilver mines for the short remainder of their miserable existence, if it were only to prevent their detestable English from contaminating a language spoken in the presence of the sun--as to those fellows, who meanly take advantage of the ardour of gentlemen in the pursuit of knowledge to recompense the inestimable services of the best years of their lives, their long study, and their expensive education with pittances too small for the acceptance of clerks, I would have the necks of every one of them wrung and their skulls arranged in Surgeons' Hall for the contemplation of the whole profession in order that its younger members might understand from actual measurement, in early life, HOW thick skulls may become!'

He wound up this vehement declaration by looking round upon us with a most agreeable smile and suddenly thundering, 'Ha, ha, ha!' over and over again, until anybody else might have been expected to be quite subdued by the exertion.

As Richard still continued to say that he was fixed in his choice after repeated periods for consideration had been recommended by Mr Jarndyce and had expired, and he still continued to assure Ada and me in the same final manner that it was 'all right,' it became advisable to take Mr Kenge into council. Mr Kenge, therefore, came down to dinner one day, and leaned back in his chair, and turned his eye-glasses over and over, and spoke in a sonorous voice, and did exactly what I remembered to have seen him do when I was a little girl.

'Ah!' said Mr Kenge. 'Yes. Well! A very good profession, Mr Jarndyce, a very good profession.'

'The course of study and preparation requires to be diligently pursued,' observed my guardian with a glance at Richard.

'Oh, no doubt,' said Mr Kenge. 'Diligently.'

'But that being the case, more or less, with all pursuits that are worth much,' said Mr Jarndyce, 'it is not a special consideration which another choice would be likely to escape.'

'Truly,' said Mr Kenge. 'And Mr Richard Carstone, who has so meritoriously acquitted himself in the--shall I say the classic shades?--in which his youth had been passed, will, no doubt, apply the habits, if not the principles and practice, of versification in that tongue in which a poet was said (unless I mistake) to be born, not made, to the more eminently practical field of action on which he enters.'

'You may rely upon it,' said Richard in his off-hand manner, 'that I shall go at it and do my best.'

'Very well, Mr Jarndyce!' said Mr Kenge, gently nodding his head. 'Really, when we are assured by Mr Richard that he means to go at it and to do his best,' nodding feelingly and smoothly over those expressions, 'I would submit to you that we have only to inquire into the best mode of carrying out the object of his ambition. Now, with reference to placing Mr Richard with some sufficiently eminent practitioner. Is there any one in view at present?'

'No one, Rick, I think?' said my guardian.

'No one, sir,' said Richard.

'Quite so!' observed Mr Kenge. 'As to situation, now. Is there any particular feeling on that head?'

'N--no,' said Richard.

'Quite so!' observed Mr Kenge again.

'I should like a little variety,' said Richard; 'I mean a good range of experience.'

'Very requisite, no doubt,' returned Mr Kenge. 'I think this may be easily arranged, Mr Jarndyce? We have only, in the first place, to discover a sufficiently eligible practitioner; and as soon as we make our want--and shall I add, our ability to pay a premium?-- known, our only difficulty will be in the selection of one from a large number. We have only, in the second place, to observe those little formalities which are rendered necessary by our time of life and our being under the guardianship of the court. We shall soon be--shall I say, in Mr Richard's own light-hearted manner, 'going at it'--to our heart's content. It is a coincidence,' said Mr Kenge with a tinge of melancholy in his smile, 'one of those coincidences which may or may not require an explanation beyond our present limited faculties, that I have a cousin in the medical profession. He might be deemed eligible by you and might be disposed to respond to this proposal. I can answer for him as little as for you, but he MIGHT!'

As this was an opening in the prospect, it was arranged that Mr Kenge should see his cousin. And as Mr Jarndyce had before proposed to take us to London for a few weeks, it was settled next day that we should make our visit at once and combine Richard's business with it.

Mr Boythorn leaving us within a week, we took up our abode at a cheerful lodging near Oxford Street over an upholsterer's shop.

London was a great wonder to us, and we were out for hours and hours at a time, seeing the sights, which appeared to be less capable of exhaustion than we were. We made the round of the principal theatres, too, with great delight, and saw all the plays that were worth seeing. I mention this because it was at the theatre that I began to be made uncomfortable again by Mr Guppy.

I was sitting in front of the box one night with Ada, and Richard was in the place he liked best, behind Ada's chair, when, happening to look down into the pit, I saw Mr Guppy, with his hair flattened down upon his head and woe depicted in his face, looking up at me. I felt all through the performance that he never looked at the actors but constantly looked at me, and always with a carefully prepared expression of the deepest misery and the profoundest dejection.

It quite spoiled my pleasure for that night because it was so very embarrassing and so very ridiculous. But from that time forth, we never went to the play without my seeing Mr Guppy in the pit, always with his hair straight and flat, his shirt-collar turned down, and a general feebleness about him. If he were not there when we went in, and I began to hope he would not come and yielded myself for a little while to the interest of the scene, I was certain to encounter his languishing eyes when I least expected it and, from that time, to be quite sure that they were fixed upon me all the evening.

I really cannot express how uneasy this made me. If he would only have brushed up his hair or turned up his collar, it would have been bad enough; but to know that that absurd figure was always gazing at me, and always in that demonstrative state of despondency, put such a constraint upon me that I did not like to laugh at the play, or to cry at it, or to move, or to speak. I seemed able to do nothing naturally. As to escaping Mr Guppy by going to the back of the box, I could not bear to do that because I knew Richard and Ada relied on having me next them and that they could never have talked together so happily if anybody else had been in my place. So there I sat, not knowing where to look--for wherever I looked, I knew Mr Guppy's eyes were following me--and thinking of the dreadful expense to which this young man was putting himself on my account.

Sometimes I thought of telling Mr Jarndyce. Then I feared that the young man would lose his situation and that I might ruin him. Sometimes I thought of confiding in Richard, but was deterred by the possibility of his fighting Mr Guppy and giving him black eyes. Sometimes I thought, should I frown at him or shake my head. Then I felt I could not do it. Sometimes I considered whether I should write to his mother, but that ended in my being convinced that to open a correspondence would be to make the matter worse. I always came to the conclusion, finally, that I could do nothing. Mr Guppy's

perseverance, all this time, not only produced him regularly at any theatre to which we went, but caused him to appear in the crowd as we were coming out, and even to get up behind our fly-- where I am sure I saw him, two or three times, struggling among the most dreadful spikes. After we got home, he haunted a post opposite our house. The upholsterer's where we lodged being at the corner of two streets, and my bedroom window being opposite the post, I was afraid to go near the window when I went upstairs, lest I should see him (as I did one moonlight night) leaning against the post and evidently catching cold. If Mr Guppy had not been, fortunately for me, engaged in the daytime, I really should have had no rest from him.

While we were making this round of gaieties, in which Mr Guppy so extraordinarily participated, the business which had helped to bring us to town was not neglected. Mr Kenge's cousin was a Mr Bayham Badger, who had a good practice at Chelsea and attended a large public institution besides. He was quite willing to receive Richard into his house and to superintend his studies, and as it seemed that those could be pursued advantageously under Mr Badger's roof, and Mr Badger liked Richard, and as Richard said he liked Mr Badger 'well enough,' an agreement was made, the Lord Chancellor's consent was obtained, and it was all settled.

On the day when matters were concluded between Richard and Mr Badger, we were all under engagement to dine at Mr Badger's house. We were to be 'merely a family party,' Mrs Badger's note said; and we found no lady there but Mrs Badger herself. She was surrounded in the drawing-room by various objects, indicative of her painting a little, playing the piano a little, playing the guitar a little, playing the harp a little, singing a little, working a little, reading a little, writing poetry a little, and botanizing a little. She was a lady of about fifty, I should think, youthfully dressed, and of a very fine complexion. If I add to the little list of her accomplishments that she rouged a little, I do not mean that there was any harm in it.

Mr Bayham Badger himself was a pink, fresh-faced, crisp-looking gentleman with a weak voice, white teeth, light hair, and surprised eyes, some years younger, I should say, than Mrs Bayham Badger. He admired her exceedingly, but principally, and to begin with, on the curious ground (as it seemed to us) of her having had three husbands. We had barely taken our seats when he said to Mr Jarndyce quite triumphantly, 'You would hardly suppose that I am Mrs Bayham Badger's third!'

'Indeed?' said Mr Jarndyce.

‘Her third!’ said Mr Badger. ‘Mrs Bayham Badger has not the appearance, Miss Summerson, of a lady who has had two former husbands?’

I said ‘Not at all!’

‘And most remarkable men!’ said Mr Badger in a tone of confidence. ‘Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy, who was Mrs Badger's first husband, was a very distinguished officer indeed. The name of Professor Dingo, my immediate predecessor, is one of European reputation.’

Mrs Badger overheard him and smiled.

‘Yes, my dear!’ Mr Badger replied to the smile, ‘I was observing to Mr Jarndyce and Miss Summerson that you had had two former husbands--both very distinguished men. And they found it, as people generally do, difficult to believe.’

‘I was barely twenty,’ said Mrs Badger, ‘when I married Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy. I was in the Mediterranean with him; I am quite a sailor. On the twelfth anniversary of my wedding-day, I became the wife of Professor Dingo.’

‘Of European reputation,’ added Mr Badger in an undertone.

‘And when Mr Badger and myself were married,’ pursued Mrs Badger, ‘we were married on the same day of the year. I had become attached to the day.’

‘So that Mrs Badger has been married to three husbands--two of them highly distinguished men,’ said Mr Badger, summing up the facts, ‘and each time upon the twenty-first of March at eleven in the forenoon!’

We all expressed our admiration.

‘But for Mr Badger's modesty,’ said Mr Jarndyce, ‘I would take leave to correct him and say three distinguished men.’

‘Thank you, Mr Jarndyce! What I always tell him!’ observed Mrs Badger.

‘And, my dear,’ said Mr Badger, ‘what do I always tell you? That without any affectation of disparaging such professional distinction as I may have attained (which our friend Mr Carstone will have many opportunities of estimating), I am not so weak--no, really,’ said Mr Badger to us generally, ‘so unreasonable--as to put my reputation on

the same footing with such first-rate men as Captain Swosser and Professor Dingo. Perhaps you may be interested, Mr Jarndyce,' continued Mr Bayham Badger, leading the way into the next drawing-room, 'in this portrait of Captain Swosser. It was taken on his return home from the African station, where he had suffered from the fever of the country. Mrs Badger considers it too yellow. But it's a very fine head. A very fine head!'

We all echoed, 'A very fine head!'

'I feel when I look at it,' said Mr Badger, "That's a man I should like to have seen!' It strikingly bespeaks the first-class man that Captain Swosser pre-eminently was. On the other side, Professor Dingo. I knew him well--attended him in his last illness--a speaking likeness! Over the piano, Mrs Bayham Badger when Mrs Swosser. Over the sofa, Mrs Bayham Badger when Mrs Dingo. Of Mrs Bayham Badger IN ESSE, I possess the original and have no copy.'

Dinner was now announced, and we went downstairs. It was a very genteel entertainment, very handsomely served. But the captain and the professor still ran in Mr Badger's head, and as Ada and I had the honour of being under his particular care, we had the full benefit of them.

'Water, Miss Summerson? Allow me! Not in that tumbler, pray. Bring me the professor's goblet, James!'

Ada very much admired some artificial flowers under a glass.

'Astonishing how they keep!' said Mr Badger. 'They were presented to Mrs Bayham Badger when she was in the Mediterranean.'

He invited Mr Jarndyce to take a glass of claret.

'Not that claret!' he said. 'Excuse me! This is an occasion, and ON an occasion I produce some very special claret I happen to have. (James, Captain Swosser's wine!) Mr Jarndyce, this is a wine that was imported by the captain, we will not say how many years ago. You will find it very curious. My dear, I shall he happy to take some of this wine with you. (Captain Swosser's claret to your mistress, James!) My love, your health!'

After dinner, when we ladies retired, we took Mrs Badger's first and second husband with us. Mrs Badger gave us in the drawing-room a biographical sketch of the life and services of Captain Swosser before his marriage and a more minute account of him dating from the time when he fell in love with her at a ball on board the Crippler, given to the officers of that ship when she lay in Plymouth Harbour.

'The dear old Crippler!' said Mrs Badger, shaking her head. 'She was a noble vessel. Trim, ship-shape, all a taunto, as Captain Swosser used to say. You must excuse me if I occasionally introduce a nautical expression; I was quite a sailor once. Captain Swosser loved that craft for my sake. When she was no longer in commission, he frequently said that if he were rich enough to buy her old hulk, he would have an inscription let into the timbers of the quarter- deck where we stood as partners in the dance to mark the spot where he fell--raked fore and aft (Captain Swosser used to say) by the fire from my tops. It was his naval way of mentioning my eyes.'

Mrs Badger shook her head, sighed, and looked in the glass.

'It was a great change from Captain Swosser to Professor Dingo,' she resumed with a plaintive smile. 'I felt it a good deal at first. Such an entire revolution in my mode of life! But custom, combined with science--particularly science--inured me to it. Being the professor's sole companion in his botanical excursions, I almost forgot that I had ever been afloat, and became quite learned. It is singular that the professor was the antipodes of Captain Swosser and that Mr Badger is not in the least like either!'

We then passed into a narrative of the deaths of Captain Swosser and Professor Dingo, both of whom seem to have had very bad complaints. In the course of it, Mrs Badger signified to us that she had never madly loved but once and that the object of that wild affection, never to be recalled in its fresh enthusiasm, was Captain Swosser. The professor was yet dying by inches in the most dismal manner, and Mrs Badger was giving us imitations of his way of saying, with great difficulty, 'Where is Laura? Let Laura give me my toast and water!' when the entrance of the gentlemen consigned him to the tomb.

Now, I observed that evening, as I had observed for some days past, that Ada and Richard were more than ever attached to each other's society, which was but natural, seeing that they were going to be separated so soon. I was therefore not very much surprised when we got home, and Ada and I retired upstairs, to find Ada more silent than usual, though I was not quite prepared for her coming into my arms and beginning to speak to me, with her face hidden.

'My darling Esther!' murmured Ada. 'I have a great secret to tell you!'

A mighty secret, my pretty one, no doubt!

'What is it, Ada?'

'Oh, Esther, you would never guess!'

‘Shall I try to guess?’ said I.

‘Oh, no! Don't! Pray don't!’ cried Ada, very much startled by the idea of my doing so.

‘Now, I wonder who it can be about?’ said I, pretending to consider.

‘It's about--’ said Ada in a whisper. ‘It's about--my cousin Richard!’

‘Well, my own!’ said I, kissing her bright hair, which was all I could see. ‘And what about him?’

‘Oh, Esther, you would never guess!’

It was so pretty to have her clinging to me in that way, hiding her face, and to know that she was not crying in sorrow but in a little glow of joy, and pride, and hope, that I would not help her just yet.

‘He says--I know it's very foolish, we are both so young--but he says,’ with a burst of tears, ‘that he loves me dearly, Esther.’

‘Does he indeed?’ said I. ‘I never heard of such a thing! Why, my pet of pets, I could have told you that weeks and weeks ago!’

To see Ada lift up her flushed face in joyful surprise, and hold me round the neck, and laugh, and cry, and blush, was so pleasant!

‘Why, my darling,’ said I, ‘what a goose you must take me for! Your cousin Richard has been loving you as plainly as he could for I don't know how long!’

‘And yet you never said a word about it!’ cried Ada, kissing me.

‘No, my love,’ said I. ‘I waited to be told.’

‘But now I have told you, you don't think it wrong of me, do you?’ returned Ada. She might have coaxed me to say no if I had been the hardest-hearted duenna in the world. Not being that yet, I said no very freely.

‘And now,’ said I, ‘I know the worst of it.’

‘Oh, that's not quite the worst of it, Esther dear!’ cried Ada, holding me tighter and laying down her face again upon my breast.

‘No?’ said I. ‘Not even that?’

‘No, not even that!’ said Ada, shaking her head.

'Why, you never mean to say--' I was beginning in joke.

But Ada, looking up and smiling through her tear's, cried, 'Yes, I do! You know, you know I do!' And then sobbed out, 'With all my heart I do! With all my whole heart, Esther!'

I told her, laughing, why I had known that, too, just as well as I had known the other! And we sat before the fire, and I had all the talking to myself for a little while (though there was not much of it); and Ada was soon quiet and happy.

'Do you think my cousin John knows, dear Dame Durden?' she asked.

'Unless my cousin John is blind, my pet,' said I, 'I should think my cousin John knows pretty well as much as we know.'

'We want to speak to him before Richard goes,' said Ada timidly, 'and we wanted you to advise us, and to tell him so. Perhaps you wouldn't mind Richard's coming in, Dame Durden?'

'Oh! Richard is outside, is he, my dear?' said I.

'I am not quite certain,' returned Ada with a bashful simplicity that would have won my heart if she had not won it long before, 'but I think he's waiting at the door.'

There he was, of course. They brought a chair on either side of me, and put me between them, and really seemed to have fallen in love with me instead of one another, they were so confiding, and so trustful, and so fond of me. They went on in their own wild way for a little while--I never stopped them; I enjoyed it too much myself-- and then we gradually fell to considering how young they were, and how there must be a lapse of several years before this early love could come to anything, and how it could come to happiness only if it were real and lasting and inspired them with a steady resolution to do their duty to each other, with constancy, fortitude, and perseverance, each always for the other's sake. Well! Richard said that he would work his fingers to the bone for Ada, and Ada said that she would work her fingers to the bone for Richard, and they called me all sorts of endearing and sensible names, and we sat there, advising and talking, half the night. Finally, before we parted, I gave them my promise to speak to their cousin John to- morrow.

So, when to-morrow came, I went to my guardian after breakfast, in the room that was our town-substitute for the growlery, and told him that I had it in trust to tell him something.

'Well, little woman,' said he, shutting up his book, 'if you have accepted the trust, there can be no harm in it.'

'I hope not, guardian,' said I. 'I can guarantee that there is no secrecy in it. For it only happened yesterday.'

'Aye? And what is it, Esther?'

'Guardian,' said I, 'you remember the happy night when first we came down to Bleak House? When Ada was singing in the dark room?'

I wished to call to his remembrance the look he had given me then. Unless I am much mistaken, I saw that I did so.

'Because--' said I with a little hesitation.

'Yes, my dear!' said he. 'Don't hurry.'

'Because,' said I, 'Ada and Richard have fallen in love. And have told each other so.'

'Already!' cried my guardian, quite astonished.

'Yes!' said I. 'And to tell you the truth, guardian, I rather expected it.'

'The deuce you did!' said he.

He sat considering for a minute or two, with his smile, at once so handsome and so kind, upon his changing face, and then requested me to let them know that he wished to see them. When they came, he encircled Ada with one arm in his fatherly way and addressed himself to Richard with a cheerful gravity.

'Rick,' said Mr Jarndyce, 'I am glad to have won your confidence. I hope to preserve it. When I contemplated these relations between us four which have so brightened my life and so invested it with new interests and pleasures, I certainly did contemplate, afar off, the possibility of you and your pretty cousin here (don't be shy, Ada, don't be shy, my dear!) being in a mind to go through life together. I saw, and do see, many reasons to make it desirable. But that was afar off, Rick, afar off!'

'We look afar off, sir,' returned Richard.

'Well!' said Mr Jarndyce. 'That's rational. Now, hear me, my dears! I might tell you that you don't know your own minds yet, that a thousand things may happen to divert you from one another, that it is well this chain of flowers you have taken up is very easily broken, or it

might become a chain of lead. But I will not do that. Such wisdom will come soon enough, I dare say, if it is to come at all. I will assume that a few years hence you will be in your hearts to one another what you are to-day. All I say before speaking to you according to that assumption is, if you DO change-- if you DO come to find that you are more commonplace cousins to each other as man and woman than you were as boy and girl (your manhood will excuse me, Rick!)--don't be ashamed still to confide in me, for there will be nothing monstrous or uncommon in it. I am only your friend and distant kinsman. I have no power over you whatever. But I wish and hope to retain your confidence if I do nothing to forfeit it.'

'I am very sure, sir,' returned Richard, 'that I speak for Ada too when I say that you have the strongest power over us both--rooted in respect, gratitude, and affection--strengthening every day.'

'Dear cousin John,' said Ada, on his shoulder, 'my father's place can never be empty again. All the love and duty I could ever have rendered to him is transferred to you.'

'Come!' said Mr Jarndyce. 'Now for our assumption. Now we lift our eyes up and look hopefully at the distance! Rick, the world is before you; and it is most probable that as you enter it, so it will receive you. Trust in nothing but in Providence and your own efforts. Never separate the two, like the heathen waggoner. Constancy in love is a good thing, but it means nothing, and is nothing, without constancy in every kind of effort. If you had the abilities of all the great men, past and present, you could do nothing well without sincerely meaning it and setting about it. If you entertain the supposition that any real success, in great things or in small, ever was or could be, ever will or can be, wrested from Fortune by fits and starts, leave that wrong idea here or leave your cousin Ada here.'

'I will leave IT here, sir,' replied Richard smiling, 'if I brought it here just now (but I hope I did not), and will work my way on to my cousin Ada in the hopeful distance.'

'Right!' said Mr Jarndyce. 'If you are not to make her happy, why should you pursue her?'

'I wouldn't make her unhappy--no, not even for her love,' retorted Richard proudly.

'Well said!' cried Mr Jarndyce. 'That's well said! She remains here, in her home with me. Love her, Rick, in your active life, no less than in her home when you revisit it, and all will go well. Otherwise, all will go ill. That's the end of my preaching. I think you and Ada had better take a walk.'

Ada tenderly embraced him, and Richard heartily shook hands with him, and then the cousins went out of the room, looking back again directly, though, to say that they would wait for me.

The door stood open, and we both followed them with our eyes as they passed down the adjoining room, on which the sun was shining, and out at its farther end. Richard with his head bent, and her hand drawn through his arm, was talking to her very earnestly; and she looked up in his face, listening, and seemed to see nothing else. So young, so beautiful, so full of hope and promise, they went on lightly through the sunlight as their own happy thoughts might then be traversing the years to come and making them all years of brightness. So they passed away into the shadow and were gone. It was only a burst of light that had been so radiant. The room darkened as they went out, and the sun was clouded over.

'Am I right, Esther?' said my guardian when they were gone.

He was so good and wise to ask ME whether he was right!

'Rick may gain, out of this, the quality he wants. Wants, at the core of so much that is good!' said Mr Jarndyce, shaking his head. 'I have said nothing to Ada, Esther. She has her friend and counsellor always near.' And he laid his hand lovingly upon my head.

I could not help showing that I was a little moved, though I did all I could to conceal it.

'Tut tut!' said he. 'But we must take care, too, that our little woman's life is not all consumed in care for others.'

'Care? My dear guardian, I believe I am the happiest creature in the world!'

'I believe so, too,' said he. 'But some one may find out what Esther never will--that the little woman is to be held in remembrance above all other people!'

I have omitted to mention in its place that there was some one else at the family dinner party. It was not a lady. It was a gentleman. It was a gentleman of a dark complexion--a young surgeon. He was rather reserved, but I thought him very sensible and agreeable. At least, Ada asked me if I did not, and I said yes.