Chapter XXIII - Esther's Narrative

We came home from Mr Boythorn's after six pleasant weeks. We were often in the park and in the woods and seldom passed the lodge where we had taken shelter without looking in to speak to the keeper's wife; but we saw no more of Lady Dedlock, except at church on Sundays. There was company at Chesney Wold; and although several beautiful faces surrounded her, her face retained the same influence on me as at first. I do not quite know even now whether it was painful or pleasurable, whether it drew me towards her or made me shrink from her. I think I admired her with a kind of fear, and I know that in her presence my thoughts always wandered back, as they had done at first, to that old time of my life.

I had a fancy, on more than one of these Sundays, that what this lady so curiously was to me, I was to her--I mean that I disturbed her thoughts as she influenced mine, though in some different way. But when I stole a glance at her and saw her so composed and distant and unapproachable, I felt this to be a foolish weakness. Indeed, I felt the whole state of my mind in reference to her to be weak and unreasonable, and I remonstrated with myself about it as much as I could.

One incident that occurred before we quitted Mr Boythorn's house, I had better mention in this place.

I was walking in the garden with Ada and when I was told that some one wished to see me. Going into the breakfast-room where this person was waiting, I found it to be the French maid who had cast off her shoes and walked through the wet grass on the day when it thundered and lightened.

'Mademoiselle,' she began, looking fixedly at me with her too-eager eyes, though otherwise presenting an agreeable appearance and speaking neither with boldness nor servility, 'I have taken a great liberty in coming here, but you know how to excuse it, being so amiable, mademoiselle.'

'No excuse is necessary,' I returned, 'if you wish to speak to me.'

'That is my desire, mademoiselle. A thousand thanks for the permission. I have your leave to speak. Is it not?' she said in a quick, natural way.

'Certainly,' said I.

'Mademoiselle, you are so amiable! Listen then, if you please. I have left my Lady. We could not agree. My Lady is so high, so very high.

Pardon! Mademoiselle, you are right!' Her quickness anticipated what I might have said presently but as yet had only thought. 'It is not for me to come here to complain of my Lady. But I say she is so high, so very high. I will not say a word more. All the world knows that.'

'Go on, if you please,' said I.

'Assuredly; mademoiselle, I am thankful for your politeness. Mademoiselle, I have an inexpressible desire to find service with a young lady who is good, accomplished, beautiful. You are good, accomplished, and beautiful as an angel. Ah, could I have the honour of being your domestic!'

'I am sorry--' I began.

'Do not dismiss me so soon, mademoiselle!' she said with an involuntary contraction of her fine black eyebrows. 'Let me hope a moment! Mademoiselle, I know this service would be more retired than that which I have quitted. Well! I wish that. I know this service would be less distinguished than that which I have quitted. Well! I wish that, I know that I should win less, as to wages here. Good. I am content.'

'I assure you,' said I, quite embarrassed by the mere idea of having such an attendant, 'that I keep no maid--'

'Ah, mademoiselle, but why not? Why not, when you can have one so devoted to you! Who would be enchanted to serve you; who would be so true, so zealous, and so faithful every day! Mademoiselle, I wish with all my heart to serve you. Do not speak of money at present. Take me as I am. For nothing!'

She was so singularly earnest that I drew back, almost afraid of her. Without appearing to notice it, in her ardour she still pressed herself upon me, speaking in a rapid subdued voice, though always with a certain grace and propriety.

'Mademoiselle, I come from the South country where we are quick and where we like and dislike very strong. My Lady was too high for me; I was too high for her. It is done--past--finished! Receive me as your domestic, and I will serve you well. I will do more for you than you figure to yourself now. Chut! Mademoiselle, I will-- no matter, I will do my utmost possible in all things. If you accept my service, you will not repent it. Mademoiselle, you will not repent it, and I will serve you well. You don't know how well!'

There was a lowering energy in her face as she stood looking at me while I explained the impossibility of my engaging her (without

thinking it necessary to say how very little I desired to do so), which seemed to bring visibly before me some woman from the streets of Paris in the reign of terror.

She heard me out without interruption and then said with her pretty accent and in her mildest voice, 'Hey, mademoiselle, I have received my answer! I am sorry of it. But I must go elsewhere and seek what I have not found here. Will you graciously let me kiss your hand?'

She looked at me more intently as she took it, and seemed to take note, with her momentary touch, of every vein in it. 'I fear I surprised you, mademoiselle, on the day of the storm?' she said with a parting curtsy.

I confessed that she had surprised us all.

'I took an oath, mademoiselle,' she said, smiling, 'and I wanted to stamp it on my mind so that I might keep it faithfully. And I will! Adieu, mademoiselle!' So ended our conference, which I was very glad to bring to a close. I supposed she went away from the village, for I saw her no more; and nothing else occurred to disturb our tranquil summer pleasures until six weeks were out and we returned home as I began just now by saying.

At that time, and for a good many weeks after that time, Richard was constant in his visits. Besides coming every Saturday or Sunday and remaining with us until Monday morning, he sometimes rode out on horseback unexpectedly and passed the evening with us and rode back again early next day. He was as vivacious as ever and told us he was very industrious, but I was not easy in my mind about him. It appeared to me that his industry was all misdirected. I could not find that it led to anything but the formation of delusive hopes in connexion with the suit already the pernicious cause of so much sorrow and ruin. He had got at the core of that mystery now, he told us, and nothing could be plainer than that the will under which he and Ada were to take I don't know how many thousands of pounds must be finally established if there were any sense or justice in the Court of Chancery--but oh, what a great IF that sounded in my ears--and that this happy conclusion could not be much longer delayed. He proved this to himself by all the weary arguments on that side he had read, and every one of them sunk him deeper in the infatuation. He had even begun to haunt the court. He told us how he saw Miss Flite there daily, how they talked together, and how he did her little kindnesses, and how, while he laughed at her, he pitied her from his heart. But he never thought--never, my poor, dear, sanguine Richard, capable of so much happiness then, and with such better things before him-- what a fatal link was riveting between his fresh youth

and her faded age, between his free hopes and her caged birds, and her hungry garret, and her wandering mind.

Ada loved him too well to mistrust him much in anything he said or did, and my guardian, though he frequently complained of the east wind and read more than usual in the growlery, preserved a strict silence on the subject. So I thought one day when I went to London to meet Caddy Jellyby, at her solicitation, I would ask Richard to be in waiting for me at the coach-office, that we might have a little talk together. I found him there when I arrived, and we walked away arm in arm.

'Well, Richard,' said I as soon as I could begin to be grave with him, 'are you beginning to feel more settled now?'

'Oh, yes, my dear!' returned Richard. 'I'm all right enough.'

'But settled?' said I.

'How do you mean, settled?' returned Richard with his gay laugh.

'Settled in the law,' said I.

'Oh, aye,' replied Richard, 'I'm all right enough.'

'You said that before, my dear Richard.'

'And you don't think it's an answer, eh? Well! Perhaps it's not. Settled? You mean, do I feel as if I were settling down?'

'Yes.'

'Why, no, I can't say I am settling down,' said Richard, strongly emphasizing 'down,' as if that expressed the difficulty, 'because one can't settle down while this business remains in such an unsettled state. When I say this business, of course I mean the-- forbidden subject.'

'Do you think it will ever be in a settled state?' said I.

'Not the least doubt of it,' answered Richard.

We walked a little way without speaking, and presently Richard addressed me in his frankest and most feeling manner, thus: 'My dear Esther, I understand you, and I wish to heaven I were a more constant sort of fellow. I don't mean constant to Ada, for I love her dearly--better and better every day--but constant to myself. (Somehow, I mean something that I can't very well express, but you'll make it out.) If I

were a more constant sort of fellow, I should have held on either to Badger or to Kenge and Carboy like grim death, and should have begun to be steady and systematic by this time, and shouldn't be in debt, and--'

'ARE you in debt, Richard?'

'Yes,' said Richard, 'I am a little so, my dear. Also, I have taken rather too much to billiards and that sort of thing. Now the murder's out; you despise me, Esther, don't you?'

'You know I don't,' said I.

'You are kinder to me than I often am to myself,' he returned. 'My dear Esther, I am a very unfortunate dog not to be more settled, but how CAN I be more settled? If you lived in an unfinished house, you couldn't settle down in it; if you were condemned to leave everything you undertook unfinished, you would find it hard to apply yourself to anything; and yet that's my unhappy case. I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes, and it began to unsettle me before I quite knew the difference between a suit at law and a suit of clothes; and it has gone on unsettling me ever since; and here I am now, conscious sometimes that I am but a worthless fellow to love my confiding cousin Ada.'

We were in a solitary place, and he put his hands before his eyes and sobbed as he said the words.

'Oh, Richard!' said I. 'Do not be so moved. You have a noble nature, and Ada's love may make you worthier every day.'

'I know, my dear,' he replied, pressing my arm, 'I know all that. You mustn't mind my being a little soft now, for I have had all this upon my mind for a long time, and have often meant to speak to you, and have sometimes wanted opportunity and sometimes courage. I know what the thought of Ada ought to do for me, but it doesn't do it. I am too unsettled even for that. I love her most devotedly, and yet I do her wrong, in doing myself wrong, every day and hour. But it can't last for ever. We shall come on for a final hearing and get judgment in our favour, and then you and Ada shall see what I can really be!'

It had given me a pang to hear him sob and see the tears start out between his fingers, but that was infinitely less affecting to me than the hopeful animation with which he said these words.

'I have looked well into the papers, Esther. I have been deep in them for months,' he continued, recovering his cheerfulness in a moment, 'and you may rely upon it that we shall come out triumphant. As to

years of delay, there has been no want of them, heaven knows! And there is the greater probability of our bringing the matter to a speedy close; in fact, it's on the paper now. It will be all right at last, and then you shall see!'

Recalling how he had just now placed Messrs. Kenge and Carboy in the same category with Mr Badger, I asked him when he intended to be articled in Lincoln's Inn.

'There again! I think not at all, Esther,' he returned with an effort. 'I fancy I have had enough of it. Having worked at Jarndyce and Jarndyce like a galley slave, I have slaked my thirst for the law and satisfied myself that I shouldn't like it. Besides, I find it unsettles me more and more to be so constantly upon the scene of action. So what,' continued Richard, confident again by this time, 'do I naturally turn my thoughts to?'

'I can't imagine,' said I.

'Don't look so serious,' returned Richard, 'because it's the best thing I can do, my dear Esther, I am certain. It's not as if I wanted a profession for life. These proceedings will come to a termination, and then I am provided for. No. I look upon it as a pursuit which is in its nature more or less unsettled, and therefore suited to my temporary condition--I may say, precisely suited. What is it that I naturally turn my thoughts to?'

I looked at him and shook my head.

'What,' said Richard, in a tone of perfect conviction, 'but the army!'

'The army?' said I.

'The army, of course. What I have to do is to get a commission; and--there I am, you know!' said Richard.

And then he showed me, proved by elaborate calculations in his pocket-book, that supposing he had contracted, say, two hundred pounds of debt in six months out of the army; and that he contracted no debt at all within a corresponding period in the army--as to which he had quite made up his mind; this step must involve a saving of four hundred pounds in a year, or two thousand pounds in five years, which was a considerable sum. And then he spoke so ingenuously and sincerely of the sacrifice he made in withdrawing himself for a time from Ada, and of the earnestness with which he aspired--as in thought he always did, I know full well--to repay her love, and to ensure her happiness, and to conquer what was amiss in himself, and to acquire the very soul of decision, that he made my heart ache

keenly, sorely. For, I thought, how would this end, how could this end, when so soon and so surely all his manly qualities were touched by the fatal blight that ruined everything it rested on!

I spoke to Richard with all the earnestness I felt, and all the hope I could not quite feel then, and implored him for Ada's sake not to put any trust in Chancery. To all I said, Richard readily assented, riding over the court and everything else in his easy way and drawing the brightest pictures of the character he was to settle into--alas, when the grievous suit should loose its hold upon him! We had a long talk, but it always came back to that, in substance.

At last we came to Soho Square, where Caddy Jellyby had appointed to wait for me, as a quiet place in the neighbourhood of Newman Street. Caddy was in the garden in the centre and hurried out as soon as I appeared. After a few cheerful words, Richard left us together.

'Prince has a pupil over the way, Esther,' said Caddy, 'and got the key for us. So if you will walk round and round here with me, we can lock ourselves in and I can tell you comfortably what I wanted to see your dear good face about.'

'Very well, my dear,' said I. 'Nothing could be better.' So Caddy, after affectionately squeezing the dear good face as she called it, locked the gate, and took my arm, and we began to walk round the garden very cosily.

'You see, Esther,' said Caddy, who thoroughly enjoyed a little confidence, 'after you spoke to me about its being wrong to marry without Ma's knowledge, or even to keep Ma long in the dark respecting our engagement--though I don't believe Ma cares much for me, I must say--I thought it right to mention your opinions to Prince. In the first place because I want to profit by everything you tell me, and in the second place because I have no secrets from Prince.'

'I hope he approved, Caddy?'

'Oh, my dear! I assure you he would approve of anything you could say. You have no idea what an opinion he has of you!'

'Indeed!'

'Esther, it's enough to make anybody but me jealous,' said Caddy, laughing and shaking her head; 'but it only makes me joyful, for you are the first friend I ever had, and the best friend I ever can have, and nobody can respect and love you too much to please me.'

‘Upon my word, Caddy,’ said I, ‘you are in the general conspiracy to keep me in a good humour. Well, my dear?’

‘Well! I am going to tell you,’ replied Caddy, crossing her hands confidentially upon my arm. ‘So we talked a good deal about it, and so I said to Prince, 'Prince, as Miss Summerson--'‘

‘I hope you didn't say 'Miss Summerson'?’

‘No. I didn't!’ cried Caddy, greatly pleased and with the brightest of faces. ‘I said, 'Esther.' I said to Prince, 'As Esther is decidedly of that opinion, Prince, and has expressed it to me, and always hints it when she writes those kind notes, which you are so fond of hearing me read to you, I am prepared to disclose the truth to Ma whenever you think proper. And I think, Prince,' said I, 'that Esther thinks that I should be in a better, and truer, and more honourable position altogether if you did the same to your papa.'‘

‘Yes, my dear,’ said I. ‘Esther certainly does think so.’

‘So I was right, you see!’ exclaimed Caddy. ‘Well! This troubled Prince a good deal, not because he had the least doubt about it, but because he is so considerate of the feelings of old Mr Turveydrop; and he had his apprehensions that old Mr Turveydrop might break his heart, or faint away, or be very much overcome in some affecting manner or other if he made such an announcement. He feared old Mr Turveydrop might consider it undutiful and might receive too great a shock. For old Mr Turveydrop's deportment is very beautiful, you know, Esther,’ said Caddy, ‘and his feelings are extremely sensitive.’

‘Are they, my dear?’

‘Oh, extremely sensitive. Prince says so. Now, this has caused my darling child--I didn't mean to use the expression to you, Esther,’ Caddy apologized, her face suffused with blushes, ‘but I generally call Prince my darling child.’

I laughed; and Caddy laughed and blushed, and went on.

‘This has caused him, Esther--’

‘Caused whom, my dear?’

‘Oh, you tiresome thing!’ said Caddy, laughing, with her pretty face on fire. ‘My darling child, if you insist upon it! This has caused him weeks of uneasiness and has made him delay, from day to day, in a very anxious manner. At last he said to me, 'Caddy, if Miss Summerson, who is a great favourite with my father, could be

prevailed upon to be present when I broke the subject, I think I could do it.' So I promised I would ask you. And I made up my mind, besides,' said Caddy, looking at me hopefully but timidly, 'that if you consented, I would ask you afterwards to come with me to Ma. This is what I meant when I said in my note that I had a great favour and a great assistance to beg of you. And if you thought you could grant it, Esther, we should both be very grateful.'

'Let me see, Caddy,' said I, pretending to consider. 'Really, I think I could do a greater thing than that if the need were pressing. I am at your service and the darling child's, my dear, whenever you like.'

Caddy was quite transported by this reply of mine, being, I believe, as susceptible to the least kindness or encouragement as any tender heart that ever beat in this world; and after another turn or two round the garden, during which she put on an entirely new pair of gloves and made herself as resplendent as possible that she might do no avoidable discredit to the Master of Deportment, we went to Newman Street direct.

Prince was teaching, of course. We found him engaged with a not very hopeful pupil--a stubborn little girl with a sulky forehead, a deep voice, and an inanimate, dissatisfied mama--whose case was certainly not rendered more hopeful by the confusion into which we threw her preceptor. The lesson at last came to an end, after proceeding as discordantly as possible; and when the little girl had changed her shoes and had had her white muslin extinguished in shawls, she was taken away. After a few words of preparation, we then went in search of Mr Turveydrop, whom we found, grouped with his hat and gloves, as a model of deportment, on the sofa in his private apartment--the only comfortable room in the house. He appeared to have dressed at his leisure in the intervals of a light collation, and his dressing-case, brushes, and so forth, all of quite an elegant kind, lay about.

'Father, Miss Summerson; Miss Jellyby.'

'Charmed! Enchanted!' said Mr Turveydrop, rising with his high-shouldered bow. 'Permit me!' Handing chairs. 'Be seated!' Kissing the tips of his left fingers. 'Overjoyed!' Shutting his eyes and rolling. 'My little retreat is made a paradise.' Recomposing himself on the sofa like the second gentleman in Europe.

'Again you find us, Miss Summerson,' said he, 'using our little arts to polish, polish! Again the sex stimulates us and rewards us by the condescension of its lovely presence. It is much in these times (and we have made an awfully degenerating business of it since the days of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent--my patron, if I may presume to say so) to experience that deportment is not wholly trodden under foot by

mechanics. That it can yet bask in the smile of beauty, my dear madam.'

I said nothing, which I thought a suitable reply; and he took a pinch of snuff.

'My dear son,' said Mr Turveydrop, 'you have four schools this afternoon. I would recommend a hasty sandwich.'

'Thank you, father,' returned Prince, 'I will be sure to be punctual. My dear father, may I beg you to prepare your mind for what I am going to say?'

'Good heaven!' exclaimed the model, pale and aghast as Prince and Caddy, hand in hand, bent down before him. 'What is this? Is this lunacy! Or what is this?'

'Father,' returned Prince with great submission, 'I love this young lady, and we are engaged.'

'Engaged!' cried Mr Turveydrop, reclining on the sofa and shutting out the sight with his hand. 'An arrow launched at my brain by my own child!'

'We have been engaged for some time, father,' faltered Prince, 'and Miss Summerson, hearing of it, advised that we should declare the fact to you and was so very kind as to attend on the present occasion. Miss Jellyby is a young lady who deeply respects you, father.'

Mr Turveydrop uttered a groan.

'No, pray don't! Pray don't, father,' urged his son. 'Miss Jellyby is a young lady who deeply respects you, and our first desire is to consider your comfort.'

Mr Turveydrop sobbed.

'No, pray don't, father!' cried his son.

'Boy,' said Mr Turveydrop, 'it is well that your sainted mother is spared this pang. Strike deep, and spare not. Strike home, sir, strike home!'

'Pray don't say so, father,' implored Prince, in tears. 'It goes to my heart. I do assure you, father, that our first wish and intention is to consider your comfort. Caroline and I do not forget our duty--what is my duty is Caroline's, as we have often said together--and with your

approval and consent, father, we will devote ourselves to making your life agreeable.'

'Strike home,' murmured Mr Turveydrop. 'Strike home!' But he seemed to listen, I thought, too.

'My dear father,' returned Prince, 'we well know what little comforts you are accustomed to and have a right to, and it will always be our study and our pride to provide those before anything. If you will bless us with your approval and consent, father, we shall not think of being married until it is quite agreeable to you; and when we ARE married, we shall always make you--of course-- our first consideration. You must ever be the head and master here, father; and we feel how truly unnatural it would be in us if we failed to know it or if we failed to exert ourselves in every possible way to please you.'

Mr Turveydrop underwent a severe internal struggle and came upright on the sofa again with his cheeks puffing over his stiff cravat, a perfect model of parental deportment.

'My son!' said Mr Turveydrop. 'My children! I cannot resist your prayer. Be happy!'

His benignity as he raised his future daughter-in-law and stretched out his hand to his son (who kissed it with affectionate respect and gratitude) was the most confusing sight I ever saw.

'My children,' said Mr Turveydrop, paternally encircling Caddy with his left arm as she sat beside him, and putting his right hand gracefully on his hip. 'My son and daughter, your happiness shall be my care. I will watch over you. You shall always live with me'--meaning, of course, I will always live with you--'this house is henceforth as much yours as mine; consider it your home. May you long live to share it with me!'

The power of his deportment was such that they really were as much overcome with thankfulness as if, instead of quartering himself upon them for the rest of his life, he were making some munificent sacrifice in their favour.

'For myself, my children,' said Mr Turveydrop, 'I am falling into the sear and yellow leaf, and it is impossible to say how long the last feeble traces of gentlemanly deportment may linger in this weaving and spinning age. But, so long, I will do my duty to society and will show myself, as usual, about town. My wants are few and simple. My little apartment here, my few essentials for the toilet, my frugal morning meal, and my little dinner will suffice. I charge your dutiful

affection with the supply of these requirements, and I charge myself with all the rest.'

They were overpowered afresh by his uncommon generosity.

'My son,' said Mr Turveydrop, 'for those little points in which you are deficient--points of deportment, which are born with a man, which may be improved by cultivation, but can never be originated-- you may still rely on me. I have been faithful to my post since the days of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, and I will not desert it now. No, my son. If you have ever contemplated your father's poor position with a feeling of pride, you may rest assured that he will do nothing to tarnish it. For yourself, Prince, whose character is different (we cannot be all alike, nor is it advisable that we should), work, be industrious, earn money, and extend the connexion as much as possible.'

'That you may depend I will do, dear father, with all my heart,' replied Prince.

'I have no doubt of it,' said Mr Turveydrop. 'Your qualities are not shining, my dear child, but they are steady and useful. And to both of you, my children, I would merely observe, in the spirit of a sainted wooman on whose path I had the happiness of casting, I believe, SOME ray of light, take care of the establishment, take care of my simple wants, and bless you both!'

Old Mr Turveydrop then became so very gallant, in honour of the occasion, that I told Caddy we must really go to Thavies Inn at once if we were to go at all that day. So we took our departure after a very loving farewell between Caddy and her betrothed, and during our walk she was so happy and so full of old Mr Turveydrop's praises that I would not have said a word in his disparagement for any consideration.

The house in Thavies Inn had bills in the windows annoucing that it was to let, and it looked dirtier and gloomier and ghastlier than ever. The name of poor Mr Jellyby had appeared in the list of bankrupts but a day or two before, and he was shut up in the dining-room with two gentlemen and a heap of blue bags, account- books, and papers, making the most desperate endeavours to understand his affairs. They appeared to me to be quite beyond his comprehension, for when Caddy took me into the dining-room by mistake and we came upon Mr Jellyby in his spectacles, forlornly fenced into a corner by the great dining-table and the two gentlemen, he seemed to have given up the whole thing and to be speechless and insensible.

Going upstairs to Mrs Jellyby's room (the children were all screaming in the kitchen, and there was no servant to be seen), we found that

lady in the midst of a voluminous correspondence, opening, reading, and sorting letters, with a great accumulation of torn covers on the floor. She was so preoccupied that at first she did not know me, though she sat looking at me with that curious, bright-eyed, far-off look of hers.

'Ah! Miss Summerson!' she said at last. 'I was thinking of something so different! I hope you are well. I am happy to see you. Mr Jarndyce and Miss Clare quite well?'

I hoped in return that Mr Jellyby was quite well.

'Why, not quite, my dear,' said Mrs Jellyby in the calmest manner. 'He has been unfortunate in his affairs and is a little out of spirits. Happily for me, I am so much engaged that I have no time to think about it. We have, at the present moment, one hundred and seventy families, Miss Summerson, averaging five persons in each, either gone or going to the left bank of the Niger.'

I thought of the one family so near us who were neither gone nor going to the left bank of the Niger, and wondered how she could be so placid.

'You have brought Caddy back, I see,' observed Mrs Jellyby with a glance at her daughter. 'It has become quite a novelty to see her here. She has almost deserted her old employment and in fact obliges me to employ a boy.'

'I am sure, Ma--' began Caddy.

'Now you know, Caddy,' her mother mildly interposed, 'that I DO employ a boy, who is now at his dinner. What is the use of your contradicting?'

'I was not going to contradict, Ma,' returned Caddy. 'I was only going to say that surely you wouldn't have me be a mere drudge all my life.'

'I believe, my dear,' said Mrs Jellyby, still opening her letters, casting her bright eyes smilingly over them, and sorting them as she spoke, 'that you have a business example before you in your mother. Besides. A mere drudge? If you had any sympathy with the destinies of the human race, it would raise you high above any such idea. But you have none. I have often told you, Caddy, you have no such sympathy.'

'Not if it's Africa, Ma, I have not.'

'Of course you have not. Now, if I were not happily so much engaged, Miss Summerson,' said Mrs Jellyby, sweetly casting her eyes for a

moment on me and considering where to put the particular letter she had just opened, 'this would distress and disappoint me. But I have so much to think of, in connexion with Borrioboola-Gha and it is so necessary I should concentrate myself that there is my remedy, you see.'

As Caddy gave me a glance of entreaty, and as Mrs Jellyby was looking far away into Africa straight through my bonnet and head, I thought it a good opportunity to come to the subject of my visit and to attract Mrs Jellyby's attention.

'Perhaps,' I began, 'you will wonder what has brought me here to interrupt you.'

'I am always delighted to see Miss Summerson,' said Mrs Jellyby, pursuing her employment with a placid smile. 'Though I wish,' and she shook her head, 'she was more interested in the Borrioboolan project.'

'I have come with Caddy,' said I, 'because Caddy justly thinks she ought not to have a secret from her mother and fancies I shall encourage and aid her (though I am sure I don't know how) in imparting one.'

'Caddy,' said Mrs Jellyby, pausing for a moment in her occupation and then serenely pursuing it after shaking her head, 'you are going to tell me some nonsense.'

Caddy untied the strings of her bonnet, took her bonnet off, and letting it dangle on the floor by the strings, and crying heartily, said, 'Ma, I am engaged.'

'Oh, you ridiculous child!' observed Mrs Jellyby with an abstracted air as she looked over the dispatch last opened; 'what a goose you are!'

'I am engaged, Ma,' sobbed Caddy, 'to young Mr Turveydrop, at the academy; and old Mr Turveydrop (who is a very gentlemanly man indeed) has given his consent, and I beg and pray you'll give us yours, Ma, because I never could be happy without it. I never, never could!' sobbed Caddy, quite forgetful of her general complainings and of everything but her natural affection.

'You see again, Miss Summerson,' observed Mrs Jellyby serenely, 'what a happiness it is to be so much occupied as I am and to have this necessity for self-concentration that I have. Here is Caddy engaged to a dancing-master's son--mixed up with people who have no more sympathy with the destinies of the human race than she has herself! This, too, when Mr Quale, one of the first philanthropists of

our time, has mentioned to me that he was really disposed to be interested in her!'

'Ma, I always hated and detested Mr Quale!' sobbed Caddy.

'Caddy, Caddy!' returned Mrs Jellyby, opening another letter with the greatest complacency. 'I have no doubt you did. How could you do otherwise, being totally destitute of the sympathies with which he overflows! Now, if my public duties were not a favourite child to me, if I were not occupied with large measures on a vast scale, these petty details might grieve me very much, Miss Summerson. But can I permit the film of a silly proceeding on the part of Caddy (from whom I expect nothing else) to interpose between me and the great African continent? No. No,' repeated Mrs Jellyby in a calm clear voice, and with an agreeable smile, as she opened more letters and sorted them. 'No, indeed.'

I was so unprepared for the perfect coolness of this reception, though I might have expected it, that I did not know what to say. Caddy seemed equally at a loss. Mrs Jellyby continued to open and sort letters and to repeat occasionally in quite a charming tone of voice and with a smile of perfect composure, 'No, indeed.'

'I hope, Ma,' sobbed poor Caddy at last, 'you are not angry?'

'Oh, Caddy, you really are an absurd girl,' returned Mrs Jellyby, 'to ask such questions after what I have said of the preoccupation of my mind.'

'And I hope, Ma, you give us your consent and wish us well?' said Caddy.

'You are a nonsensical child to have done anything of this kind,' said Mrs Jellyby; 'and a degenerate child, when you might have devoted yourself to the great public measure. But the step is taken, and I have engaged a boy, and there is no more to be said. Now, pray, Caddy,' said Mrs Jellyby, for Caddy was kissing her, 'don't delay me in my work, but let me clear off this heavy batch of papers before the afternoon post comes in!'

I thought I could not do better than take my leave; I was detained for a moment by Caddy's saying, 'You won't object to my bringing him to see you, Ma?'

'Oh, dear me, Caddy,' cried Mrs Jellyby, who had relapsed into that distant contemplation, 'have you begun again? Bring whom?'

'Him, Ma.'

‘Caddy, Caddy!’ said Mrs Jellyby, quite weary of such little matters. ‘Then you must bring him some evening which is not a Parent Society night, or a Branch night, or a Ramification night. You must accommodate the visit to the demands upon my time. My dear Miss Summerson, it was very kind of you to come here to help out this silly chit. Good-bye! When I tell you that I have fifty- eight new letters from manufacturing families anxious to understand the details of the native and coffee-cultivation question this morning, I need not apologize for having very little leisure.’

I was not surprised by Caddy's being in low spirits when we went downstairs, or by her sobbing afresh on my neck, or by her saying she would far rather have been scolded than treated with such indifference, or by her confiding to me that she was so poor in clothes that how she was ever to be married creditably she didn't know. I gradually cheered her up by dwelling on the many things she would do for her unfortunate father and for Peepy when she had a home of her own; and finally we went downstairs into the damp dark kitchen, where Peepy and his little brothers and sisters were grovelling on the stone floor and where we had such a game of play with them that to prevent myself from being quite torn to pieces I was obliged to fall back on my fairy-tales. From time to time I heard loud voices in the parlour overhead, and occasionally a violent tumbling about of the furniture. The last effect I am afraid was caused by poor Mr Jellyby's breaking away from the dining-table and making rushes at the window with the intention of throwing himself into the area whenever he made any new attempt to understand his affairs.

As I rode quietly home at night after the day's bustle, I thought a good deal of Caddy's engagement and felt confirmed in my hopes (in spite of the elder Mr Turveydrop) that she would be the happier and better for it. And if there seemed to be but a slender chance of her and her husband ever finding out what the model of deportment really was, why that was all for the best too, and who would wish them to be wiser? I did not wish them to be any wiser and indeed was half ashamed of not entirely believing in him myself. And I looked up at the stars, and thought about travellers in distant countries and the stars THEY saw, and hoped I might always be so blest and happy as to be useful to some one in my small way.

They were so glad to see me when I got home, as they always were, that I could have sat down and cried for joy if that had not been a method of making myself disagreeable. Everybody in the house, from the lowest to the highest, showed me such a bright face of welcome, and spoke so cheerily, and was so happy to do anything for me, that I suppose there never was such a fortunate little creature in the world.

We got into such a chatty state that night, through Ada and my guardian drawing me out to tell them all about Caddy, that I went on prose, prose, prosing for a length of time. At last I got up to my own room, quite red to think how I had been holding forth, and then I heard a soft tap at my door. So I said, 'Come in!' and there came in a pretty little girl, neatly dressed in mourning, who dropped a curtsy.

'If you please, miss,' said the little girl in a soft voice, 'I am Charley.'

'Why, so you are,' said I, stooping down in astonishment and giving her a kiss. 'How glad am I to see you, Charley!'

'If you please, miss,' pursued Charley in the same soft voice, 'I'm your maid.'

'Charley?'

'If you please, miss, I'm a present to you, with Mr Jarndyce's love.'

I sat down with my hand on Charley's neck and looked at Charley.

'And oh, miss,' says Charley, clapping her hands, with the tears starting down her dimpled cheeks, 'Tom's at school, if you please, and learning so good! And little Emma, she's with Mrs Blinder, miss, a-being took such care of! And Tom, he would have been at school--and Emma, she would have been left with Mrs Blinder--and me, I should have been here--all a deal sooner, miss; only Mr Jarndyce thought that Tom and Emma and me had better get a little used to parting first, we was so small. Don't cry, if you please, miss!'

'I can't help it, Charley.'

'No, miss, nor I can't help it,' says Charley. 'And if you please, miss, Mr Jarndyce's love, and he thinks you'll like to teach me now and then. And if you please, Tom and Emma and me is to see each other once a month. And I'm so happy and so thankful, miss,' cried Charley with a heaving heart, 'and I'll try to be such a good maid!'

'Oh, Charley dear, never forget who did all this!'

'No, miss, I never will. Nor Tom won't. Nor yet Emma. It was all you, miss.'

'I have known nothing of it. It was Mr Jarndyce, Charley.'

'Yes, miss, but it was all done for the love of you and that you might be my mistress. If you please, miss, I am a little present with his love,

and it was all done for the love of you. Me and Tom was to be sure to remember it.'

Charley dried her eyes and entered on her functions, going in her matronly little way about and about the room and folding up everything she could lay her hands upon. Presently Charley came creeping back to my side and said, 'Oh, don't cry, if you please, miss.'

And I said again, 'I can't help it, Charley.'

And Charley said again, 'No, miss, nor I can't help it.' And so, after all, I did cry for joy indeed, and so did she.