

## CHAPTER XLV - In Trust

One morning when I had done jingling about with my baskets of keys, as my beauty and I were walking round and round the garden I happened to turn my eyes towards the house and saw a long thin shadow going in which looked like Mr Vholes. Ada had been telling me only that morning of her hopes that Richard might exhaust his ardour in the Chancery suit by being so very earnest in it; and therefore, not to damp my dear girl's spirits, I said nothing about Mr Vholes's shadow.

Presently came Charley, lightly winding among the bushes and tripping along the paths, as rosy and pretty as one of Flora's attendants instead of my maid, saying, 'Oh, if you please, miss, would you step and speak to Mr Jarndyce!'

It was one of Charley's peculiarities that whenever she was charged with a message she always began to deliver it as soon as she beheld, at any distance, the person for whom it was intended. Therefore I saw Charley asking me in her usual form of words to 'step and speak' to Mr Jarndyce long before I heard her. And when I did hear her, she had said it so often that she was out of breath.

I told Ada I would make haste back and inquired of Charley as we went in whether there was not a gentleman with Mr Jarndyce. To which Charley, whose grammar, I confess to my shame, never did any credit to my educational powers, replied, 'Yes, miss. Him as come down in the country with Mr Richard.'

A more complete contrast than my guardian and Mr Vholes I suppose there could not be. I found them looking at one another across a table, the one so open and the other so close, the one so broad and upright and the other so narrow and stooping, the one giving out what he had to say in such a rich ringing voice and the other keeping it in in such a cold-blooded, gasping, fish-like manner that I thought I never had seen two people so unmatched.

'You know Mr Vholes, my dear,' said my guardian. Not with the greatest urbanity, I must say.

Mr Vholes rose, gloved and buttoned up as usual, and seated himself again, just as he had seated himself beside Richard in the gig. Not having Richard to look at, he looked straight before him.

'Mr Vholes,' said my guardian, eyeing his black figure as if he were a bird of ill omen, 'has brought an ugly report of our most unfortunate Rick.' Laying a marked emphasis on 'most unfortunate' as if the words were rather descriptive of his connexion with Mr Vholes.

I sat down between them; Mr Vholes remained immovable, except that he secretly picked at one of the red pimples on his yellow face with his black glove.

‘And as Rick and you are happily good friends, I should like to know,’ said my guardian, ‘what you think, my dear. Would you be so good as to--as to speak up, Mr Vholes?’

Doing anything but that, Mr Vholes observed, ‘I have been saying that I have reason to know, Miss Summerson, as Mr C.'s professional adviser, that Mr C.'s circumstances are at the present moment in an embarrassed state. Not so much in point of amount as owing to the peculiar and pressing nature of liabilities Mr C. has incurred and the means he has of liquidating or meeting the same. I have staved off many little matters for Mr C., but there is a limit to staving off, and we have reached it. I have made some advances out of pocket to accommodate these unpleasantnesses, but I necessarily look to being repaid, for I do not pretend to be a man of capital, and I have a father to support in the Vale of Taunton, besides striving to realize some little independence for three dear girls at home. My apprehension is, Mr C.'s circumstances being such, lest it should end in his obtaining leave to part with his commission, which at all events is desirable to be made known to his connexions.’

Mr Vholes, who had looked at me while speaking, here emerged into the silence he could hardly be said to have broken, so stifled was his tone, and looked before him again.

‘Imagine the poor fellow without even his present resource,’ said my guardian to me. ‘Yet what can I do? You know him, Esther. He would never accept of help from me now. To offer it or hint at it would be to drive him to an extremity, if nothing else did.’

Mr Vholes hereupon addressed me again.

‘What Mr Jarndyce remarks, miss, is no doubt the case, and is the difficulty. I do not see that anything is to be done, I do not say that anything is to be done. Far from it. I merely come down here under the seal of confidence and mention it in order that everything may be openly carried on and that it may not be said afterwards that everything was not openly carried on. My wish is that everything should be openly carried on. I desire to leave a good name behind me. If I consulted merely my own interests with Mr C., I should not be here. So insurmountable, as you must well know, would be his objections. This is not a professional attendance. This can be charged to nobody. I have no interest in it except as a member of society and a father--AND a son,’ said Mr Vholes, who had nearly forgotten that point.

It appeared to us that Mr Vholes said neither more nor less than the truth in intimating that he sought to divide the responsibility, such as it was, of knowing Richard's situation. I could only suggest that I should go down to Deal, where Richard was then stationed, and see him, and try if it were possible to avert the worst. Without consulting Mr Vholes on this point, I took my guardian aside to propose it, while Mr Vholes gauntly stalked to the fire and warmed his funeral gloves.

The fatigue of the journey formed an immediate objection on my guardian's part, but as I saw he had no other, and as I was only too happy to go, I got his consent. We had then merely to dispose of Mr Vholes.

'Well, sir,' said Mr Jarndyce, 'Miss Summerson will communicate with Mr Carstone, and you can only hope that his position may be yet retrievable. You will allow me to order you lunch after your journey, sir.'

'I thank you, Mr Jarndyce,' said Mr Vholes, putting out his long black sleeve to check the ringing of the bell, 'not any. I thank you, no, not a morsel. My digestion is much impaired, and I am but a poor knife and fork at any time. If I was to partake of solid food at this period of the day, I don't know what the consequences might be. Everything having been openly carried on, sir, I will now with your permission take my leave.'

'And I would that you could take your leave, and we could all take our leave, Mr Vholes,' returned my guardian bitterly, 'of a cause you know of.'

Mr Vholes, whose black dye was so deep from head to foot that it had quite steamed before the fire, diffusing a very unpleasant perfume, made a short one-sided inclination of his head from the neck and slowly shook it.

'We whose ambition it is to be looked upon in the light of respectable practitioners, sir, can but put our shoulders to the wheel. We do it, sir. At least, I do it myself; and I wish to think well of my professional brethren, one and all. You are sensible of an obligation not to refer to me, miss, in communicating with Mr C.?'

I said I would be careful not to do it.

'Just so, miss. Good morning. Mr Jarndyce, good morning, sir.' Mr Vholes put his dead glove, which scarcely seemed to have any hand in it, on my fingers, and then on my guardian's fingers, and took his long thin shadow away. I thought of it on the outside of the coach, passing

over all the sunny landscape between us and London, chilling the seed in the ground as it glided along.

Of course it became necessary to tell Ada where I was going and why I was going, and of course she was anxious and distressed. But she was too true to Richard to say anything but words of pity and words of excuse, and in a more loving spirit still--my dear devoted girl!--she wrote him a long letter, of which I took charge.

Charley was to be my travelling companion, though I am sure I wanted none and would willingly have left her at home. We all went to London that afternoon, and finding two places in the mail, secured them. At our usual bed-time, Charley and I were rolling away seaward with the Kentish letters.

It was a night's journey in those coach times, but we had the mail to ourselves and did not find the night very tedious. It passed with me as I suppose it would with most people under such circumstances. At one while my journey looked hopeful, and at another hopeless. Now I thought I should do some good, and now I wondered how I could ever have supposed so. Now it seemed one of the most reasonable things in the world that I should have come, and now one of the most unreasonable. In what state I should find Richard, what I should say to him, and what he would say to me occupied my mind by turns with these two states of feeling; and the wheels seemed to play one tune (to which the burden of my guardian's letter set itself) over and over again all night.

At last we came into the narrow streets of Deal, and very gloomy they were upon a raw misty morning. The long flat beach, with its little irregular houses, wooden and brick, and its litter of capstans, and great boats, and sheds, and bare upright poles with tackle and blocks, and loose gravelly waste places overgrown with grass and weeds, wore as dull an appearance as any place I ever saw. The sea was heaving under a thick white fog; and nothing else was moving but a few early ropemakers, who, with the yarn twisted round their bodies, looked as if, tired of their present state of existence, they were spinning themselves into cordage.

But when we got into a warm room in an excellent hotel and sat down, comfortably washed and dressed, to an early breakfast (for it was too late to think of going to bed), Deal began to look more cheerful. Our little room was like a ship's cabin, and that delighted Charley very much. Then the fog began to rise like a curtain, and numbers of ships that we had had no idea were near appeared. I don't know how many sail the waiter told us were then lying in the downs. Some of these vessels were of grand size--one was a large Indiaman just come home; and when the sun shone through the clouds, making silvery pools in

the dark sea, the way in which these ships brightened, and shadowed, and changed, amid a bustle of boats pulling off from the shore to them and from them to the shore, and a general life and motion in themselves and everything around them, was most beautiful.

The large Indiaman was our great attraction because she had come into the downs in the night. She was surrounded by boats, and we said how glad the people on board of her must be to come ashore. Charley was curious, too, about the voyage, and about the heat in India, and the serpents and the tigers; and as she picked up such information much faster than grammar, I told her what I knew on those points. I told her, too, how people in such voyages were sometimes wrecked and cast on rocks, where they were saved by the intrepidity and humanity of one man. And Charley asking how that could be, I told her how we knew at home of such a case.

I had thought of sending Richard a note saying I was there, but it seemed so much better to go to him without preparation. As he lived in barracks I was a little doubtful whether this was feasible, but we went out to reconnoitre. Peeping in at the gate of the barrack-yard, we found everything very quiet at that time in the morning, and I asked a sergeant standing on the guardhouse- steps where he lived. He sent a man before to show me, who went up some bare stairs, and knocked with his knuckles at a door, and left us.

'Now then!' cried Richard from within. So I left Charley in the little passage, and going on to the half-open door, said, 'Can I come in, Richard? It's only Dame Durden.'

He was writing at a table, with a great confusion of clothes, tin cases, books, boots, brushes, and portmanteaus strewn all about the floor. He was only half dressed--in plain clothes, I observed, not in uniform--and his hair was unbrushed, and he looked as wild as his room. All this I saw after he had heartily welcomed me and I was seated near him, for he started upon hearing my voice and caught me in his arms in a moment. Dear Richard! He was ever the same to me. Down to--ah, poor poor fellow!--to the end, he never received me but with something of his old merry boyish manner.

'Good heaven, my dear little woman,' said he, 'how do you come here? Who could have thought of seeing you! Nothing the matter? Ada is well?'

'Quite well. Lovelier than ever, Richard!'

'Ah!' he said, leaning back in his chair. 'My poor cousin! I was writing to you, Esther.'

So worn and haggard as he looked, even in the fullness of his handsome youth, leaning back in his chair and crushing the closely written sheet of paper in his hand!

'Have you been at the trouble of writing all that, and am I not to read it after all?' I asked.

'Oh, my dear,' he returned with a hopeless gesture. 'You may read it in the whole room. It is all over here.'

I mildly entreated him not to be despondent. I told him that I had heard by chance of his being in difficulty and had come to consult with him what could best be done.

'Like you, Esther, but useless, and so NOT like you!' said he with a melancholy smile. 'I am away on leave this day--should have been gone in another hour--and that is to smooth it over, for my selling out. Well! Let bygones be bygones. So this calling follows the rest. I only want to have been in the church to have made the round of all the professions.'

'Richard,' I urged, 'it is not so hopeless as that?'

'Esther,' he returned, 'it is indeed. I am just so near disgrace as that those who are put in authority over me (as the catechism goes) would far rather be without me than with me. And they are right. Apart from debts and duns and all such drawbacks, I am not fit even for this employment. I have no care, no mind, no heart, no soul, but for one thing. Why, if this bubble hadn't broken now,' he said, tearing the letter he had written into fragments and moodily casting them away, by driblets, 'how could I have gone abroad? I must have been ordered abroad, but how could I have gone? How could I, with my experience of that thing, trust even Vholes unless I was at his back!'

I suppose he knew by my face what I was about to say, but he caught the hand I had laid upon his arm and touched my own lips with it to prevent me from going on.

'No, Dame Durden! Two subjects I forbid--must forbid. The first is John Jarndyce. The second, you know what. Call it madness, and I tell you I can't help it now, and can't be sane. But it is no such thing; it is the one object I have to pursue. It is a pity I ever was prevailed upon to turn out of my road for any other. It would be wisdom to abandon it now, after all the time, anxiety, and pains I have bestowed upon it! Oh, yes, true wisdom. It would be very agreeable, too, to some people; but I never will.'

He was in that mood in which I thought it best not to increase his determination (if anything could increase it) by opposing him. I took out Ada's letter and put it in his hand.

'Am I to read it now?' he asked.

As I told him yes, he laid it on the table, and resting his head upon his hand, began. He had not read far when he rested his head upon his two hands--to hide his face from me. In a little while he rose as if the light were bad and went to the window. He finished reading it there, with his back towards me, and after he had finished and had folded it up, stood there for some minutes with the letter in his hand. When he came back to his chair, I saw tears in his eyes.

'Of course, Esther, you know what she says here?' He spoke in a softened voice and kissed the letter as he asked me.

'Yes, Richard.'

'Offers me,' he went on, tapping his foot upon the floor, 'the little inheritance she is certain of so soon--just as little and as much as I have wasted--and begs and prays me to take it, set myself right with it, and remain in the service.'

'I know your welfare to be the dearest wish of her heart,' said I. 'And, oh, my dear Richard, Ada's is a noble heart.'

'I am sure it is. I--I wish I was dead!'

He went back to the window, and laying his arm across it, leaned his head down on his arm. It greatly affected me to see him so, but I hoped he might become more yielding, and I remained silent. My experience was very limited; I was not at all prepared for his rousing himself out of this emotion to a new sense of injury.

'And this is the heart that the same John Jarndyce, who is not otherwise to be mentioned between us, stepped in to estrange from me,' said he indignantly. 'And the dear girl makes me this generous offer from under the same John Jarndyce's roof, and with the same John Jarndyce's gracious consent and connivance, I dare say, as a new means of buying me off.'

'Richard!' I cried out, rising hastily. 'I will not hear you say such shameful words!' I was very angry with him indeed, for the first time in my life, but it only lasted a moment. When I saw his worn young face looking at me as if he were sorry, I put my hand on his shoulder and said, 'If you please, my dear Richard, do not speak in such a tone to me. Consider!'

He blamed himself exceedingly and told me in the most generous manner that he had been very wrong and that he begged my pardon a thousand times. At that I laughed, but trembled a little too, for I was rather fluttered after being so fiery.

'To accept this offer, my dear Esther,' said he, sitting down beside me and resuming our conversation, '--once more, pray, pray forgive me; I am deeply grieved--to accept my dearest cousin's offer is, I need not say, impossible. Besides, I have letters and papers that I could show you which would convince you it is all over here. I have done with the red coat, believe me. But it is some satisfaction, in the midst of my troubles and perplexities, to know that I am pressing Ada's interests in pressing my own. Vholes has his shoulder to the wheel, and he cannot help urging it on as much for her as for me, thank God!'

His sanguine hopes were rising within him and lighting up his features, but they made his face more sad to me than it had been before.

'No, no!' cried Richard exultingly. 'If every farthing of Ada's little fortune were mine, no part of it should be spent in retaining me in what I am not fit for, can take no interest in, and am weary of. It should be devoted to what promises a better return, and should be used where she has a larger stake. Don't be uneasy for me! I shall now have only one thing on my mind, and Vholes and I will work it. I shall not be without means. Free of my commission, I shall be able to compound with some small usurers who will hear of nothing but their bond now--Vholes says so. I should have a balance in my favour anyway, but that would swell it. Come, come! You shall carry a letter to Ada from me, Esther, and you must both of you be more hopeful of me and not believe that I am quite cast away just yet, my dear.'

I will not repeat what I said to Richard. I know it was tiresome, and nobody is to suppose for a moment that it was at all wise. It only came from my heart. He heard it patiently and feelingly, but I saw that on the two subjects he had reserved it was at present hopeless to make any representation to him. I saw too, and had experienced in this very interview, the sense of my guardian's remark that it was even more mischievous to use persuasion with him than to leave him as he was.

Therefore I was driven at last to asking Richard if he would mind convincing me that it really was all over there, as he had said, and that it was not his mere impression. He showed me without hesitation a correspondence making it quite plain that his retirement was arranged. I found, from what he told me, that Mr Vholes had copies of these papers and had been in consultation with him throughout. Beyond ascertaining this, and having been the bearer of Ada's letter, and being (as I was going to be) Richard's companion back to London,



I had done no good by coming down. Admitting this to myself with a reluctant heart, I said I would return to the hotel and wait until he joined me there, so he threw a cloak over his shoulders and saw me to the gate, and Charley and I went back along the beach.

There was a concourse of people in one spot, surrounding some naval officers who were landing from a boat, and pressing about them with unusual interest. I said to Charley this would be one of the great Indiaman's boats now, and we stopped to look.

The gentlemen came slowly up from the waterside, speaking good-humouredly to each other and to the people around and glancing about them as if they were glad to be in England again. 'Charley, Charley,' said I, 'come away!' And I hurried on so swiftly that my little maid was surprised.

It was not until we were shut up in our cabin-room and I had had time to take breath that I began to think why I had made such haste. In one of the sunburnt faces I had recognized Mr Allan Woodcourt, and I had been afraid of his recognizing me. I had been unwilling that he should see my altered looks. I had been taken by surprise, and my courage had quite failed me.

But I knew this would not do, and I now said to myself, 'My dear, there is no reason--there is and there can be no reason at all--why it should be worse for you now than it ever has been. What you were last month, you are to-day; you are no worse, you are no better. This is not your resolution; call it up, Esther, call it up!' I was in a great tremble--with running--and at first was quite unable to calm myself; but I got better, and I was very glad to know it.

The party came to the hotel. I heard them speaking on the staircase. I was sure it was the same gentlemen because I knew their voices again--I mean I knew Mr Woodcourt's. It would still have been a great relief to me to have gone away without making myself known, but I was determined not to do so. 'No, my dear, no. No, no, no!'

I untied my bonnet and put my veil half up--I think I mean half down, but it matters very little--and wrote on one of my cards that I happened to be there with Mr Richard Carstone, and I sent it in to Mr Woodcourt. He came immediately. I told him I was rejoiced to be by chance among the first to welcome him home to England. And I saw that he was very sorry for me.

'You have been in shipwreck and peril since you left us, Mr Woodcourt,' said I, 'but we can hardly call that a misfortune which enabled you to be so useful and so brave. We read of it with the truest

interest. It first came to my knowledge through your old patient, poor Miss Flite, when I was recovering from my severe illness.'

'Ah! Little Miss Flite!' he said. 'She lives the same life yet?'

'Just the same.'

I was so comfortable with myself now as not to mind the veil and to be able to put it aside.

'Her gratitude to you, Mr Woodcourt, is delightful. She is a most affectionate creature, as I have reason to say.'

'You--you have found her so?' he returned. 'I--I am glad of that.' He was so very sorry for me that he could scarcely speak.

'I assure you,' said I, 'that I was deeply touched by her sympathy and pleasure at the time I have referred to.'

'I was grieved to hear that you had been very ill.'

'I was very ill.'

'But you have quite recovered?'

'I have quite recovered my health and my cheerfulness,' said I. 'You know how good my guardian is and what a happy life we lead, and I have everything to be thankful for and nothing in the world to desire.'

I felt as if he had greater commiseration for me than I had ever had for myself. It inspired me with new fortitude and new calmness to find that it was I who was under the necessity of reassuring him. I spoke to him of his voyage out and home, and of his future plans, and of his probable return to India. He said that was very doubtful. He had not found himself more favoured by fortune there than here. He had gone out a poor ship's surgeon and had come home nothing better. While we were talking, and when I was glad to believe that I had alleviated (if I may use such a term) the shock he had had in seeing me, Richard came in. He had heard downstairs who was with me, and they met with cordial pleasure.

I saw that after their first greetings were over, and when they spoke of Richard's career, Mr Woodcourt had a perception that all was not going well with him. He frequently glanced at his face as if there were something in it that gave him pain, and more than once he looked towards me as though he sought to ascertain whether I knew what the truth was. Yet Richard was in one of his sanguine states and in good

spirits and was thoroughly pleased to see Mr Woodcourt again, whom he had always liked.

Richard proposed that we all should go to London together; but Mr Woodcourt, having to remain by his ship a little longer, could not join us. He dined with us, however, at an early hour, and became so much more like what he used to be that I was still more at peace to think I had been able to soften his regrets. Yet his mind was not relieved of Richard. When the coach was almost ready and Richard ran down to look after his luggage, he spoke to me about him.

I was not sure that I had a right to lay his whole story open, but I referred in a few words to his estrangement from Mr Jarndyce and to his being entangled in the ill-fated Chancery suit. Mr Woodcourt listened with interest and expressed his regret.

'I saw you observe him rather closely,' said I, 'Do you think him so changed?'

'He is changed,' he returned, shaking his head.

I felt the blood rush into my face for the first time, but it was only an instantaneous emotion. I turned my head aside, and it was gone.

'It is not,' said Mr Woodcourt, 'his being so much younger or older, or thinner or fatter, or paler or ruddier, as there being upon his face such a singular expression. I never saw so remarkable a look in a young person. One cannot say that it is all anxiety or all weariness; yet it is both, and like ungrown despair.'

'You do not think he is ill?' said I.

No. He looked robust in body.

'That he cannot be at peace in mind, we have too much reason to know,' I proceeded. 'Mr Woodcourt, you are going to London?'

'To-morrow or the next day.'

'There is nothing Richard wants so much as a friend. He always liked you. Pray see him when you get there. Pray help him sometimes with your companionship if you can. You do not know of what service it might be. You cannot think how Ada, and Mr Jarndyce, and even I--how we should all thank you, Mr Woodcourt!'

'Miss Summerson,' he said, more moved than he had been from the first, 'before heaven, I will be a true friend to him! I will accept him as a trust, and it shall be a sacred one!'

'God bless you!' said I, with my eyes filling fast; but I thought they might, when it was not for myself. 'Ada loves him--we all love him, but Ada loves him as we cannot. I will tell her what you say. Thank you, and God bless you, in her name!'

Richard came back as we finished exchanging these hurried words and gave me his arm to take me to the coach.

'Woodcourt,' he said, unconscious with what application, 'pray let us meet in London!'

'Meet?' returned the other. 'I have scarcely a friend there now but you. Where shall I find you?'

'Why, I must get a lodging of some sort,' said Richard, pondering. 'Say at Vholes's, Symond's Inn.'

'Good! Without loss of time.'

They shook hands heartily. When I was seated in the coach and Richard was yet standing in the street, Mr Woodcourt laid his friendly hand on Richard's shoulder and looked at me. I understood him and waved mine in thanks.

And in his last look as we drove away, I saw that he was very sorry for me. I was glad to see it. I felt for my old self as the dead may feel if they ever revisit these scenes. I was glad to be tenderly remembered, to be gently pitied, not to be quite forgotten.