

## **CHAPTER LXV - Beginning the World**

The term had commenced, and my guardian found an intimation from Mr Kenge that the cause would come on in two days. As I had sufficient hopes of the will to be in a flutter about it, Allan and I agreed to go down to the court that morning. Richard was extremely agitated and was so weak and low, though his illness was still of the mind, that my dear girl indeed had sore occasion to be supported. But she looked forward--a very little way now--to the help that was to come to her, and never drooped.

It was at Westminster that the cause was to come on. It had come on there, I dare say, a hundred times before, but I could not divest myself of an idea that it MIGHT lead to some result now. We left home directly after breakfast to be at Westminster Hall in good time and walked down there through the lively streets--so happily and strangely it seemed!--together.

As we were going along, planning what we should do for Richard and Ada, I heard somebody calling 'Esther! My dear Esther! Esther!' And there was Caddy Jellyby, with her head out of the window of a little carriage which she hired now to go about in to her pupils (she had so many), as if she wanted to embrace me at a hundred yards' distance. I had written her a note to tell her of all that my guardian had done, but had not had a moment to go and see her. Of course we turned back, and the affectionate girl was in that state of rapture, and was so overjoyed to talk about the night when she brought me the flowers, and was so determined to squeeze my face (bonnet and all) between her hands, and go on in a wild manner altogether, calling me all kinds of precious names, and telling Allan I had done I don't know what for her, that I was just obliged to get into the little carriage and calm her down by letting her say and do exactly what she liked. Allan, standing at the window, was as pleased as Caddy; and I was as pleased as either of them; and I wonder that I got away as I did, rather than that I came off laughing, and red, and anything but tidy, and looking after Caddy, who looked after us out of the coach-window as long as she could see us.

This made us some quarter of an hour late, and when we came to Westminster Hall we found that the day's business was begun. Worse than that, we found such an unusual crowd in the Court of Chancery that it was full to the door, and we could neither see nor hear what was passing within. It appeared to be something droll, for occasionally there was a laugh and a cry of 'Silence!' It appeared to be something interesting, for every one was pushing and striving to get nearer. It appeared to be something that made the professional gentlemen very merry, for there were several young counsellors in wigs and whiskers on the outside of the crowd, and when one of them told the others

about it, they put their hands in their pockets, and quite doubled themselves up with laughter, and went stamping about the pavement of the Hall.

We asked a gentleman by us if he knew what cause was on. He told us Jarndyce and Jarndyce. We asked him if he knew what was doing in it. He said really, no he did not, nobody ever did, but as well as he could make out, it was over. Over for the day? we asked him. No, he said, over for good.

Over for good!

When we heard this unaccountable answer, we looked at one another quite lost in amazement. Could it be possible that the will had set things right at last and that Richard and Ada were going to be rich? It seemed too good to be true. Alas it was!

Our suspense was short, for a break-up soon took place in the crowd, and the people came streaming out looking flushed and hot and bringing a quantity of bad air with them. Still they were all exceedingly amused and were more like people coming out from a farce or a juggler than from a court of justice. We stood aside, watching for any countenance we knew, and presently great bundles of paper began to be carried out--bundles in bags, bundles too large to be got into any bags, immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes, which the bearers staggered under, and threw down for the time being, anyhow, on the Hall pavement, while they went back to bring out more. Even these clerks were laughing. We glanced at the papers, and seeing Jarndyce and Jarndyce everywhere, asked an official-looking person who was standing in the midst of them whether the cause was over. Yes, he said, it was all up with it at last, and burst out laughing too.

At this juncture we perceived Mr Kenge coming out of court with an affable dignity upon him, listening to Mr Vholes, who was deferential and carried his own bag. Mr Vholes was the first to see us. 'Here is Miss Summerson, sir,' he said. 'And Mr Woodcourt.'

'Oh, indeed! Yes. Truly!' said Mr Kenge, raising his hat to me with polished politeness. 'How do you do? Glad to see you. Mr Jarndyce is not here?'

No. He never came there, I reminded him.

'Really,' returned Mr Kenge, 'it is as well that he is NOT here to-day, for his--shall I say, in my good friend's absence, his indomitable singularity of opinion?--might have been strengthened, perhaps; not reasonably, but might have been strengthened.'

'Pray what has been done to-day?' asked Allan.

'I beg your pardon?' said Mr Kenge with excessive urbanity.

'What has been done to-day?'

'What has been done,' repeated Mr Kenge. 'Quite so. Yes. Why, not much has been done; not much. We have been checked--brought up suddenly, I would say--upon the--shall I term it threshold?'

'Is this will considered a genuine document, sir?' said Allan. 'Will you tell us that?'

'Most certainly, if I could,' said Mr Kenge; 'but we have not gone into that, we have not gone into that.'

'We have not gone into that,' repeated Mr Vholes as if his low inward voice were an echo.

'You are to reflect, Mr Woodcourt,' observed Mr Kenge, using his silver trowel persuasively and smoothly, 'that this has been a great cause, that this has been a protracted cause, that this has been a complex cause. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has been termed, not inaptly, a monument of Chancery practice.'

'And patience has sat upon it a long time,' said Allan.

'Very well indeed, sir,' returned Mr Kenge with a certain condescending laugh he had. 'Very well! You are further to reflect, Mr Woodcourt,' becoming dignified almost to severity, 'that on the numerous difficulties, contingencies, masterly fictions, and forms of procedure in this great cause, there has been expended study, ability, eloquence, knowledge, intellect, Mr Woodcourt, high intellect. For many years, the--a--I would say the flower of the bar, and the--a--I would presume to add, the matured autumnal fruits of the woolsack--have been lavished upon Jarndyce and Jarndyce. If the public have the benefit, and if the country have the adornment, of this great grasp, it must be paid for in money or money's worth, sir.'

'Mr Kenge,' said Allan, appearing enlightened all in a moment. 'Excuse me, our time presses. Do I understand that the whole estate is found to have been absorbed in costs?'

'Hem! I believe so,' returned Mr Kenge. 'Mr Vholes, what do YOU say?'

'I believe so,' said Mr Vholes.

'And that thus the suit lapses and melts away?'

'Probably,' returned Mr Kenge. 'Mr Vholes?'

'Probably,' said Mr Vholes.

'My dearest life,' whispered Allan, 'this will break Richard's heart!'

There was such a shock of apprehension in his face, and he knew Richard so perfectly, and I too had seen so much of his gradual decay, that what my dear girl had said to me in the fullness of her foreboding love sounded like a knell in my ears.

'In case you should be wanting Mr C., sir,' said Mr Vholes, coming after us, 'you'll find him in court. I left him there resting himself a little. Good day, sir; good day, Miss Summerson.' As he gave me that slowly devouring look of his, while twisting up the strings of his bag before he hastened with it after Mr Kenge, the benignant shadow of whose conversational presence he seemed afraid to leave, he gave one gasp as if he had swallowed the last morsel of his client, and his black buttoned-up unwholesome figure glided away to the low door at the end of the Hall.

'My dear love,' said Allan, 'leave to me, for a little while, the charge you gave me. Go home with this intelligence and come to Ada's by and by!'

I would not let him take me to a coach, but entreated him to go to Richard without a moment's delay and leave me to do as he wished. Hurrying home, I found my guardian and told him gradually with what news I had returned. 'Little woman,' said he, quite unmoved for himself, 'to have done with the suit on any terms is a greater blessing than I had looked for. But my poor young cousins!'

We talked about them all the morning and discussed what it was possible to do. In the afternoon my guardian walked with me to Symond's Inn and left me at the door. I went upstairs. When my darling heard my footsteps, she came out into the small passage and threw her arms round my neck, but she composed herself directly and said that Richard had asked for me several times. Allan had found him sitting in the corner of the court, she told me, like a stone figure. On being roused, he had broken away and made as if he would have spoken in a fierce voice to the judge. He was stopped by his mouth being full of blood, and Allan had brought him home.

He was lying on a sofa with his eyes closed when I went in. There were restoratives on the table; the room was made as airy as possible, and was darkened, and was very orderly and quiet. Allan stood behind him watching him gravely. His face appeared to me to be quite destitute of colour, and now that I saw him without his seeing me, I fully saw, for

the first time, how worn away he was. But he looked handsomer than I had seen him look for many a day.

I sat down by his side in silence. Opening his eyes by and by, he said in a weak voice, but with his old smile, 'Dame Durden, kiss me, my dear!'

It was a great comfort and surprise to me to find him in his low state cheerful and looking forward. He was happier, he said, in our intended marriage than he could find words to tell me. My husband had been a guardian angel to him and Ada, and he blessed us both and wished us all the joy that life could yield us. I almost felt as if my own heart would have broken when I saw him take my husband's hand and hold it to his breast.

We spoke of the future as much as possible, and he said several times that he must be present at our marriage if he could stand upon his feet. Ada would contrive to take him, somehow, he said. 'Yes, surely, dearest Richard!' But as my darling answered him thus hopefully, so serene and beautiful, with the help that was to come to her so near--I knew--I knew!

It was not good for him to talk too much, and when he was silent, we were silent too. Sitting beside him, I made a pretence of working for my dear, as he had always been used to joke about my being busy. Ada leaned upon his pillow, holding his head upon her arm. He dozed often, and whenever he awoke without seeing him, said first of all, 'Where is Woodcourt?'

Evening had come on when I lifted up my eyes and saw my guardian standing in the little hall. 'Who is that, Dame Durden?' Richard asked me. The door was behind him, but he had observed in my face that some one was there.

I looked to Allan for advice, and as he nodded 'Yes,' bent over Richard and told him. My guardian saw what passed, came softly by me in a moment, and laid his hand on Richard's. 'Oh, sir,' said Richard, 'you are a good man, you are a good man!' and burst into tears for the first time.

My guardian, the picture of a good man, sat down in my place, keeping his hand on Richard's.

'My dear Rick,' said he, 'the clouds have cleared away, and it is bright now. We can see now. We were all bewildered, Rick, more or less. What matters! And how are you, my dear boy?'

'I am very weak, sir, but I hope I shall be stronger. I have to begin the world.'

'Aye, truly; well said!' cried my guardian.

'I will not begin it in the old way now,' said Richard with a sad smile. 'I have learned a lesson now, sir. It was a hard one, but you shall be assured, indeed, that I have learned it.'

'Well, well,' said my guardian, comforting him; 'well, well, well, dear boy!'

'I was thinking, sir,' resumed Richard, 'that there is nothing on earth I should so much like to see as their house--Dame Durden's and Woodcourt's house. If I could be removed there when I begin to recover my strength, I feel as if I should get well there sooner than anywhere.'

'Why, so have I been thinking too, Rick,' said my guardian, 'and our little woman likewise; she and I have been talking of it this very day. I dare say her husband won't object. What do you think?'

Richard smiled and lifted up his arm to touch him as he stood behind the head of the couch.

'I say nothing of Ada,' said Richard, 'but I think of her, and have thought of her very much. Look at her! See her here, sir, bending over this pillow when she has so much need to rest upon it herself, my dear love, my poor girl!'

He clasped her in his arms, and none of us spoke. He gradually released her, and she looked upon us, and looked up to heaven, and moved her lips.

'When I get down to Bleak House,' said Richard, 'I shall have much to tell you, sir, and you will have much to show me. You will go, won't you?'

'Undoubtedly, dear Rick.'

'Thank you; like you, like you,' said Richard. 'But it's all like you. They have been telling me how you planned it and how you remembered all Esther's familiar tastes and ways. It will be like coming to the old Bleak House again.'

'And you will come there too, I hope, Rick. I am a solitary man now, you know, and it will be a charity to come to me. A charity to come to me, my love!' he repeated to Ada as he gently passed his hand over

her golden hair and put a lock of it to his lips. (I think he vowed within himself to cherish her if she were left alone.)

'It was a troubled dream?' said Richard, clasping both my guardian's hands eagerly.

'Nothing more, Rick; nothing more.'

'And you, being a good man, can pass it as such, and forgive and pity the dreamer, and be lenient and encouraging when he wakes?'

'Indeed I can. What am I but another dreamer, Rick?'

'I will begin the world!' said Richard with a light in his eyes.

My husband drew a little nearer towards Ada, and I saw him solemnly lift up his hand to warn my guardian.

'When shall I go from this place to that pleasant country where the old times are, where I shall have strength to tell what Ada has been to me, where I shall be able to recall my many faults and blindnesses, where I shall prepare myself to be a guide to my unborn child?' said Richard. 'When shall I go?'

'Dear Rick, when you are strong enough,' returned my guardian.

'Ada, my darling!'

He sought to raise himself a little. Allan raised him so that she could hold him on her bosom, which was what he wanted.

'I have done you many wrongs, my own. I have fallen like a poor stray shadow on your way, I have married you to poverty and trouble, I have scattered your means to the winds. You will forgive me all this, my Ada, before I begin the world?'

A smile irradiated his face as she bent to kiss him. He slowly laid his face down upon her bosom, drew his arms closer round her neck, and with one parting sob began the world. Not this world, oh, not this! The world that sets this right.

When all was still, at a late hour, poor crazed Miss Flite came weeping to me and told me she had given her birds their liberty.