

The Case laid before Brother Charles 811

boldens me to proceed. When you first took me into your confidence, and dispatched me on those missions to Miss Bray, I should have told you that I had seen her, long before; that her beauty had made an impression upon me which I could not efface; and that I had fruitlessly endeavoured to trace her, and become acquainted with her history. I did not tell you so, because I vainly thought I could conquer my weaker feelings, and render every consideration subservient to my duty to you."

"Mr. Nickleby," said brother Charles, "you did not violate the confidence I placed in you, or take an unworthy advantage of it. I am sure you did not."

"I did not," said Nicholas, firmly. "Although I found that the necessity for self-command and restraint became every day more imperious, and the difficulty greater, I never for one instant spoke or looked but as I would have done had you been by. I never for one moment deserted my trust, nor have I to this time. But I find that constant association and companionship with this sweet girl is fatal to my peace of mind, and may prove destructive to the resolutions I made in the beginning and up to this time have faithfully kept. In short, sir, I cannot trust myself, and I implore and beseech you to remove this young lady from under the charge of my mother and sister, without delay. I know that to any one but myself—to you, who consider the immeasurable distance between me and this young lady, who is now your ward, and the object of your peculiar care—my loving her, even in thought, must appear the height of rashness and presumption. I know it is so. But, who can see her as I have seen, who can know what her life has been, and not love her? I have no excuse but that; and as I cannot fly from this temptation, and cannot repress this passion with its object constantly before me, what can I do but pray you to remove it, and to leave me to forget her!"

"Mr. Nickleby," said the old man, after a short silence, "you can do no more. I was wrong to expose a young man like you, to this trial. I might have foreseen what would happen. Thank you, sir, thank you. Madeline shall be removed."

"If you would grant me one favour, dear sir, and suffer her to remember me with esteem, by never revealing to her this confession——"