

## Chapter XL - The Bitter Waters Spread

MR IRWINE returned from Stoniton in a post-chaise that night, and the first words Carroll said to him, as he entered the house, were, that Squire Donnithorne was dead - found dead in his bed at ten o'clock that morning - and that Mrs. Irwine desired him to say she should be awake when Mr Irwine came home, and she begged him not to go to bed without seeing her.

'Well, Dauphin,' Mrs. Irwine said, as her son entered her room, 'you're come at last. So the old gentleman's fidgetiness and low spirits, which made him send for Arthur in that sudden way, really meant something. I suppose Carroll has told you that Donnithorne was found dead in his bed this morning. You will believe my prognostications another time, though I daresay I shan't live to prognosticate anything but my own death.'

'What have they done about Arthur?' said Mr Irwine. 'Sent a messenger to await him at Liverpool?'

'Yes, Ralph was gone before the news was brought to us. Dear Arthur, I shall live now to see him master at the Chase, and making good times on the estate, like a generous-hearted fellow as he is. He'll be as happy as a king now.'

Mr Irwine could not help giving a slight groan: he was worn with anxiety and exertion, and his mother's light words were almost intolerable.

'What are you so dismal about, Dauphin? Is there any bad news? Or are you thinking of the danger for Arthur in crossing that frightful Irish Channel at this time of year?'

'No, Mother, I'm not thinking of that; but I'm not prepared to rejoice just now.'

'You've been worried by this law business that you've been to Stoniton about. What in the world is it, that you can't tell me?'

'You will know by and by, mother. It would not be right for me to tell you at present. Good-night: you'll sleep now you have no longer anything to listen for.'

Mr Irwine gave up his intention of sending a letter to meet Arthur, since it would not now hasten his return: the news of his grandfather's death would bring him as soon as he could possibly come. He could go to bed now and get some needful rest, before the

time came for the morning's heavy duty of carrying his sickening news to the Hall Farm and to Adam's home.

Adam himself was not come back from Stoniton, for though he shrank from seeing Hetty, he could not bear to go to a distance from her again.

'It's no use, sir,' he said to the rector, 'it's no use for me to go back. I can't go to work again while she's here, and I couldn't bear the sight o' the things and folks round home. I'll take a bit of a room here, where I can see the prison walls, and perhaps I shall get, in time, to bear seeing her.'

Adam had not been shaken in his belief that Hetty was innocent of the crime she was charged with, for Mr Irwine, feeling that the belief in her guilt would be a crushing addition to Adam's load, had kept from him the facts which left no hope in his own mind. There was not any reason for thrusting the whole burden on Adam at once, and Mr Irwine, at parting, only said, 'If the evidence should tell too strongly against her, Adam, we may still hope for a pardon. Her youth and other circumstances will be a plea for her.'

'Ah, and it's right people should know how she was tempted into the wrong way,' said Adam, with bitter earnestness. 'It's right they should know it was a fine gentleman made love to her, and turned her head wi' notions. You'll remember, sir, you've promised to tell my mother, and Seth, and the people at the farm, who it was as led her wrong, else they'll think harder of her than she deserves. You'll be doing her a hurt by sparing him, and I hold him the guiltiest before God, let her ha' done what she may. If you spare him, I'll expose him!'

'I think your demand is just, Adam,' said Mr Irwine, 'but when you are calmer, you will judge Arthur more mercifully. I say nothing now, only that his punishment is in other hands than ours.'

Mr Irwine felt it hard upon him that he should have to tell of Arthur's sad part in the story of sin and sorrow - he who cared for Arthur with fatherly affection, who had cared for him with fatherly pride. But he saw clearly that the secret must be known before long, even apart from Adam's determination, since it was scarcely to be supposed that Hetty would persist to the end in her obstinate silence. He made up his mind to withhold nothing from the Poysers, but to tell them the worst at once, for there was no time to rob the tidings of their suddenness. Hetty's trial must come on at the Lent assizes, and they were to be held at Stoniton the next week. It was scarcely to be hoped that Martin Poyser could escape the pain of being called as a witness, and it was better he should know everything as long beforehand as possible.

Before ten o'clock on Thursday morning the home at the Hall Farm was a house of mourning for a misfortune felt to be worse than death. The sense of family dishonour was too keen even in the kind-hearted Martin Poyser the younger to leave room for any compassion towards Hetty. He and his father were simple-minded farmers, proud of their untarnished character, proud that they came of a family which had held up its head and paid its way as far back as its name was in the parish register; and Hetty had brought disgrace on them all - disgrace that could never be wiped out. That was the all-conquering feeling in the mind both of father and son - the scorching sense of disgrace, which neutralised all other sensibility - and Mr Irwine was struck with surprise to observe that Mrs. Poyser was less severe than her husband. We are often startled by the severity of mild people on exceptional occasions; the reason is, that mild people are most liable to be under the yoke of traditional impressions.

'I'm willing to pay any money as is wanted towards trying to bring her off,' said Martin the younger when Mr Irwine was gone, while the old grandfather was crying in the opposite chair, 'but I'll not go nigh her, nor ever see her again, by my own will. She's made our bread bitter to us for all our lives to come, an' we shall ne'er hold up our heads i' this parish nor i' any other. The parson talks o' folks pitying us: it's poor amends pity 'ull make us.'

'Pity?' said the grandfather, sharply. 'I ne'er wanted folks's pity i' MY life afore...an' I mun begin to be looked down on now, an' me turned seventy-two last St. Thomas's, an' all th' underbearers and pallbearers as I'n picked for my funeral are i' this parish and the next to 't....It's o' no use now...I mun be ta'en to the grave by strangers.'

'Don't fret so, father,' said Mrs. Poyser, who had spoken very little, being almost overawed by her husband's unusual hardness and decision. 'You'll have your children wi' you; an' there's the lads and the little un 'ull grow up in a new parish as well as i' th' old un.'

'Ah, there's no staying i' this country for us now,' said Mr Poyser, and the hard tears trickled slowly down his round cheeks. 'We thought it 'ud be bad luck if the old squire gave us notice this Lady day, but I must gi' notice myself now, an' see if there can anybody be got to come an' take to the crops as I'n put i' the ground; for I wanna stay upo' that man's land a day longer nor I'm forced to't. An' me, as thought him such a good upright young man, as I should be glad when he come to be our landlord. I'll ne'er lift my hat to him again, nor sit i' the same church wi' him...a man as has brought shame on respectable folks...an' pretended to be such a friend t' everybody....Poor Adam there...a fine friend he's been t' Adam, making speeches an' talking so fine, an' all the while poisoning the lad's life, as it's much if he can stay i' this country any more nor we can.'

'An' you t' ha' to go into court, and own you're akin t' her,' said the old man. 'Why, they'll cast it up to the little un, as isn't four 'ear old, some day - they'll cast it up t' her as she'd a cousin tried at the 'sizes for murder.'

'It'll be their own wickedness, then,' said Mrs. Poyser, with a sob in her voice. 'But there's One above 'ull take care o' the innicent child, else it's but little truth they tell us at church. It'll be harder nor ever to die an' leave the little uns, an' nobody to be a mother to 'em.'

'We'd better ha' sent for Dinah, if we'd known where she is,' said Mr Poyser; 'but Adam said she'd left no direction where she'd be at Leeds.'

'Why, she'd be wi' that woman as was a friend t' her Aunt Judith,' said Mrs. Poyser, comforted a little by this suggestion of her husbands. 'I've often heard Dinah talk of her, but I can't remember what name she called her by. But there's Seth Bede; he's like enough to know, for she's a preaching woman as the Methodists think a deal on.'

'I'll send to Seth,' said Mr Poyser. 'I'll send Alick to tell him to come, or else to send up word o' the woman's name, an' thee canst write a letter ready to send off to Treddles'on as soon as we can make out a direction.'

'It's poor work writing letters when you want folks to come to you i' trouble,' said Mrs. Poyser. 'Happen it'll be ever so long on the road, an' never reach her at last.'

Before Alick arrived with the message, Lisbeth's thoughts too had already flown to Dinah, and she had said to Seth, 'Eh, there's no comfort for us i' this world any more, wi'out thee couldst get Dinah Morris to come to us, as she did when my old man died. I'd like her to come in an' take me by th' hand again, an' talk to me. She'd tell me the rights on't, belike - she'd happen know some good i' all this trouble an' heart-break comin' upo' that poor lad, as ne'er done a bit o' wrong in's life, but war better nor anybody else's son, pick the country round. Eh, my lad...Adam, my poor lad!'

'Thee wouldstna like me to leave thee, to go and fetch Dinah?' said Seth, as his mother sobbed and rocked herself to and fro.

'Fetch her?' said Lisbeth, looking up and pausing from her grief, like a crying child who hears some promise of consolation. 'Why, what place is't she's at, do they say?'

'It's a good way off, mother - Leeds, a big town. But I could be back in three days, if thee couldst spare me.'

'Nay, nay, I canna spare thee. Thee must go an' see thy brother, an' bring me word what he's a-doin'. Mester Irwine said he'd come an' tell me, but I canna make out so well what it means when he tells me. Thee must go thysen, sin' Adam wanna let me go to him. Write a letter to Dinah canstna? Thee't fond enough o' writin' when nobody wants thee.'

'I'm not sure where she'd be i' that big town,' said Seth. 'If I'd gone myself, I could ha' found out by asking the members o' the Society. But perhaps if I put Sarah Williamson, Methodist preacher, Leeds, o' th' outside, it might get to her; for most like she'd be wi' Sarah Williamson.'

Alick came now with the message, and Seth, finding that Mrs. Poyser was writing to Dinah, gave up the intention of writing himself; but he went to the Hall Farm to tell them all he could suggest about the address of the letter, and warn them that there might be some delay in the delivery, from his not knowing an exact direction.

On leaving Lisbeth, Mr Irwine had gone to Jonathan Burge, who had also a claim to be acquainted with what was likely to keep Adam away from business for some time; and before six o'clock that evening there were few people in Broxton and Hayslope who had not heard the sad news. Mr Irwine had not mentioned Arthur's name to Burge, and yet the story of his conduct towards Hetty, with all the dark shadows cast upon it by its terrible consequences, was presently as well known as that his grandfather was dead, and that he was come into the estate. For Martin Poyser felt no motive to keep silence towards the one or two neighbours who ventured to come and shake him sorrowfully by the hand on the first day of his trouble; and Carroll, who kept his ears open to all that passed at the rectory, had framed an inferential version of the story, and found early opportunities of communicating it.

One of those neighbours who came to Martin Poyser and shook him by the hand without speaking for some minutes was Bartle Massey. He had shut up his school, and was on his way to the rectory, where he arrived about half-past seven in the evening, and, sending his duty to Mr Irwine, begged pardon for troubling him at that hour, but had something particular on his mind. He was shown into the study, where Mr Irwine soon joined him.

'Well, Bartle?' said Mr Irwine, putting out his hand. That was not his usual way of saluting the schoolmaster, but trouble makes us treat all who feel with us very much alike. 'Sit down.'

'You know what I'm come about as well as I do, sir, I daresay,' said Bartle.

'You wish to know the truth about the sad news that has reached you...about Hetty Sorrel?'

'Nay, sir, what I wish to know is about Adam Bede. I understand you left him at Stoniton, and I beg the favour of you to tell me what's the state of the poor lad's mind, and what he means to do. For as for that bit o' pink-and-white they've taken the trouble to put in jail, I don't value her a rotten nut - not a rotten nut - only for the harm or good that may come out of her to an honest man - a lad I've set such store by - trusted to, that he'd make my bit o' knowledge go a good way in the world....Why, sir, he's the only scholar I've had in this stupid country that ever had the will or the head-piece for mathematics. If he hadn't had so much hard work to do, poor fellow, he might have gone into the higher branches, and then this might never have happened - might never have happened.'

Bartle was heated by the exertion of walking fast in an agitated frame of mind, and was not able to check himself on this first occasion of venting his feelings. But he paused now to rub his moist forehead, and probably his moist eyes also.

'You'll excuse me, sir,' he said, when this pause had given him time to reflect, 'for running on in this way about my own feelings, like that foolish dog of mine howling in a storm, when there's nobody wants to listen to me. I came to hear you speak, not to talk myself - if you'll take the trouble to tell me what the poor lad's doing.'

'Don't put yourself under any restraint, Bartle,' said Mr Irwine. 'The fact is, I'm very much in the same condition as you just now; I've a great deal that's painful on my mind, and I find it hard work to be quite silent about my own feelings and only attend to others. I share your concern for Adam, though he is not the only one whose sufferings I care for in this affair. He intends to remain at Stoniton till after the trial: it will come on probably a week to-morrow. He has taken a room there, and I encouraged him to do so, because I think it better he should be away from his own home at present; and, poor fellow, he still believes Hetty is innocent - he wants to summon up courage to see her if he can; he is unwilling to leave the spot where she is.'

'Do you think the creatur's guilty, then?' said Bartle. 'Do you think they'll hang her?'

'I'm afraid it will go hard with her. The evidence is very strong. And one bad symptom is that she denies everything - denies that she has had a child in the face of the most positive evidence. I saw her myself, and she was obstinately silent to me; she shrank up like a frightened animal when she saw me. I was never so shocked in my life as at the

change in her. But I trust that, in the worst case, we may obtain a pardon for the sake of the innocent who are involved.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Bartle, forgetting in his irritation to whom he was speaking. 'I beg your pardon, sir, I mean it's stuff and nonsense for the innocent to care about her being hanged. For my own part, I think the sooner such women are put out o' the world the better; and the men that help 'em to do mischief had better go along with 'em for that matter. What good will you do by keeping such vermin alive, eating the victual that 'ud feed rational beings? But if Adam's fool enough to care about it, I don't want him to suffer more than's needful....Is he very much cut up, poor fellow?' Bartle added, taking out his spectacles and putting them on, as if they would assist his imagination.

'Yes, I'm afraid the grief cuts very deep,' said Mr Irwine. 'He looks terribly shattered, and a certain violence came over him now and then yesterday, which made me wish I could have remained near him. But I shall go to Stoniton again to-morrow, and I have confidence enough in the strength of Adam's principle to trust that he will be able to endure the worst without being driven to anything rash.'

Mr Irwine, who was involuntarily uttering his own thoughts rather than addressing Bartle Massey in the last sentence, had in his mind the possibility that the spirit of vengeance to-wards Arthur, which was the form Adam's anguish was continually taking, might make him seek an encounter that was likely to end more fatally than the one in the Grove. This possibility heightened the anxiety with which he looked forward to Arthur's arrival. But Bartle thought Mr Irwine was referring to suicide, and his face wore a new alarm.

'I'll tell you what I have in my head, sir,' he said, 'and I hope you'll approve of it. I'm going to shut up my school - if the scholars come, they must go back again, that's all - and I shall go to Stoniton and look after Adam till this business is over. I'll pretend I'm come to look on at the assizes; he can't object to that. What do you think about it, sir?'

'Well,' said Mr Irwine, rather hesitatingly, 'there would be some real advantages in that...and I honour you for your friendship towards him, Bartle. But...you must be careful what you say to him, you know. I'm afraid you have too little fellow-feeling in what you consider his weakness about Hetty.'

'Trust to me, sir - trust to me. I know what you mean. I've been a fool myself in my time, but that's between you and me. I shan't thrust myself on him only keep my eye on him, and see that he gets some good food, and put in a word here and there.'

'Then,' said Mr Irwine, reassured a little as to Bartle's discretion, 'I think you'll be doing a good deed; and it will be well for you to let Adam's mother and brother know that you're going.'

'Yes, sir, yes,' said Bartle, rising, and taking off his spectacles, 'I'll do that, I'll do that; though the mother's a whimpering thing - I don't like to come within earshot of her; however, she's a straight-backed, clean woman, none of your slatterns. I wish you good-bye, sir, and thank you for the time you've spared me. You're everybody's friend in this business - everybody's friend. It's a heavy weight you've got on your shoulders.'

'Good-bye, Bartle, till we meet at Stoniton, as I daresay we shall.'

Bartle hurried away from the rectory, evading Carroll's conversational advances, and saying in an exasperated tone to Vixen, whose short legs pattered beside him on the gravel, 'Now, I shall be obliged to take you with me, you good-for-nothing woman. You'd go fretting yourself to death if I left you - you know you would, and perhaps get snapped up by some tramp. And you'll be running into bad company, I expect, putting your nose in every hole and corner where you've no business! But if you do anything disgraceful, I'll disown you - mind that, madam, mind that!'