

## Chapter XLI - The Eve Of The Trial

AN upper room in a dull Stoniton street, with two beds in it - one laid on the floor. It is ten o'clock on Thursday night, and the dark wall opposite the window shuts out the moonlight that might have struggled with the light of the one dip candle by which Bartle Massey is pretending to read, while he is really looking over his spectacles at Adam Bede, seated near the dark window.

You would hardly have known it was Adam without being told. His face has got thinner this last week: he has the sunken eyes, the neglected beard of a man just risen from a sick-bed. His heavy black hair hangs over his forehead, and there is no active impulse in him which inclines him to push it off, that he may be more awake to what is around him. He has one arm over the back of the chair, and he seems to be looking down at his clasped hands. He is roused by a knock at the door.

'There he is,' said Bartle Massey, rising hastily and unfastening the door. It was Mr Irwine.

Adam rose from his chair with instinctive respect, as Mr Irwine approached him and took his hand.

'I'm late, Adam,' he said, sitting down on the chair which Bartle placed for him, 'but I was later in setting off from Broxton than I intended to be, and I have been incessantly occupied since I arrived. I have done everything now, however - everything that can be done to-night, at least. Let us all sit down.'

Adam took his chair again mechanically, and Bartle, for whom there was no chair remaining, sat on the bed in the background.

'Have you seen her, sir?' said Adam tremulously.

'Yes, Adam; I and the chaplain have both been with her this evening.'

'Did you ask her, sir...did you say anything about me?'

'Yes,' said Mr Irwine, with some hesitation, 'I spoke of you. I said you wished to see her before the trial, if she consented.'

As Mr Irwine paused, Adam looked at him with eager, questioning eyes.

'You know she shrinks from seeing any one, Adam. It is not only you - some fatal influence seems to have shut up her heart against her fellow-creatures. She has scarcely said anything more than 'No' either

to me or the chaplain. Three or four days ago, before you were mentioned to her, when I asked her if there was any one of her family whom she would like to see - to whom she could open her mind - she said, with a violent shudder, 'Tell them not to come near me - I won't see any of them.'

Adam's head was hanging down again, and he did not speak. There was silence for a few minutes, and then Mr Irwine said, 'I don't like to advise you against your own feelings, Adam, if they now urge you strongly to go and see her to-morrow morning, even without her consent. It is just possible, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, that the interview might affect her favourably. But I grieve to say I have scarcely any hope of that. She didn't seem agitated when I mentioned your name; she only said 'No,' in the same cold, obstinate way as usual. And if the meeting had no good effect on her, it would be pure, useless suffering to you - severe suffering, I fear. She is very much changed...'

Adam started up from his chair and seized his hat, which lay on the table. But he stood still then, and looked at Mr Irwine, as if he had a question to ask which it was yet difficult to utter. Bartle Massey rose quietly, turned the key in the door, and put it in his pocket.

'Is he come back?' said Adam at last.

'No, he is not,' said Mr Irwine, quietly. 'Lay down your hat, Adam, unless you like to walk out with me for a little fresh air. I fear you have not been out again to-day.'

'You needn't deceive me, sir,' said Adam, looking hard at Mr Irwine and speaking in a tone of angry suspicion. 'You needn't be afraid of me. I only want justice. I want him to feel what she feels. It's his work...she was a child as it 'ud ha' gone t' anybody's heart to look at...I don't care what she's done...it was him brought her to it. And he shall know it...he shall feel it...if there's a just God, he shall feel what it is t' ha' brought a child like her to sin and misery.'

'I'm not deceiving you, Adam,' said Mr Irwine. 'Arthur Donnithorne is not come back - was not come back when I left. I have left a letter for him: he will know all as soon as he arrives.'

'But you don't mind about it,' said Adam indignantly. 'You think it doesn't matter as she lies there in shame and misery, and he knows nothing about it - he suffers nothing.'

'Adam, he WILL know - he WILL suffer, long and bitterly. He has a heart and a conscience: I can't be entirely deceived in his character. I am convinced - I am sure he didn't fall under temptation without a

struggle. He may be weak, but he is not callous, not coldly selfish. I am persuaded that this will be a shock of which he will feel the effects all his life. Why do you crave vengeance in this way? No amount of torture that you could inflict on him could benefit her.'

'No - O God, no,' Adam groaned out, sinking on his chair again; 'but then, that's the deepest curse of all...that's what makes the blackness of it...IT CAN NEVER BE UNDONE. My poor Hetty...she can never be my sweet Hetty again...the prettiest thing God had made - smiling up at me...I thought she loved me...and was good...'

Adam's voice had been gradually sinking into a hoarse undertone, as if he were only talking to himself; but now he said abruptly, looking at Mr Irwine, 'But she isn't as guilty as they say? You don't think she is, sir? She can't ha' done it.'

'That perhaps can never be known with certainty, Adam,' Mr Irwine answered gently. 'In these cases we sometimes form our judgment on what seems to us strong evidence, and yet, for want of knowing some small fact, our judgment is wrong. But suppose the worst: you have no right to say that the guilt of her crime lies with him, and that he ought to bear the punishment. It is not for us men to apportion the shares of moral guilt and retribution. We find it impossible to avoid mistakes even in determining who has committed a single criminal act, and the problem how far a man is to be held responsible for the unforeseen consequences of his own deed is one that might well make us tremble to look into it. The evil consequences that may lie folded in a single act of selfish indulgence is a thought so awful that it ought surely to awaken some feeling less presumptuous than a rash desire to punish. You have a mind that can understand this fully, Adam, when you are calm. Don't suppose I can't enter into the anguish that drives you into this state of revengeful hatred. But think of this: if you were to obey your passion - for it IS passion, and you deceive yourself in calling it justice - it might be with you precisely as it has been with Arthur; nay, worse; your passion might lead you yourself into a horrible crime.'

'No - not worse,' said Adam, bitterly; 'I don't believe it's worse - I'd sooner do it - I'd sooner do a wickedness as I could suffer for by myself than ha' brought HER to do wickedness and then stand by and see 'em punish her while they let me alone; and all for a bit o' pleasure, as, if he'd had a man's heart in him, he'd ha' cut his hand off sooner than he'd ha' taken it. What if he didn't foresee what's happened? He foresaw enough; he'd no right to expect anything but harm and shame to her. And then he wanted to smooth it off wi' lies. No - there's plenty o' things folks are hanged for not half so hateful as that. Let a man do what he will, if he knows he's to bear the punishment himself, he isn't half so bad as a mean selfish coward as

makes things easy t' himself and knows all the while the punishment 'll fall on somebody else.'

'There again you partly deceive yourself, Adam. There is no sort of wrong deed of which a man can bear the punishment alone; you can't isolate yourself and say that the evil which is in you shall not spread. Men's lives are as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe: evil spreads as necessarily as disease. I know, I feel the terrible extent of suffering this sin of Arthur's has caused to others; but so does every sin cause suffering to others besides those who commit it. An act of vengeance on your part against Arthur would simply be another evil added to those we are suffering under: you could not bear the punishment alone; you would entail the worst sorrows on every one who loves you. You would have committed an act of blind fury that would leave all the present evils just as they were and add worse evils to them. You may tell me that you meditate no fatal act of vengeance, but the feeling in your mind is what gives birth to such actions, and as long as you indulge it, as long as you do not see that to fix your mind on Arthur's punishment is revenge, and not justice, you are in danger of being led on to the commission of some great wrong. Remember what you told me about your feelings after you had given that blow to Arthur in the Grove.'

Adam was silent: the last words had called up a vivid image of the past, and Mr Irwine left him to his thoughts, while he spoke to Bartle Massey about old Mr Donnithorne's funeral and other matters of an indifferent kind. But at length Adam turned round and said, in a more subdued tone, 'I've not asked about 'em at th' Hall Farm, sir. Is Mr Poyser coming?'

'He is come; he is in Stoniton to-night. But I could not advise him to see you, Adam. His own mind is in a very perturbed state, and it is best he should not see you till you are calmer.'

'Is Dinah Morris come to 'em, sir? Seth said they'd sent for her.'

'No. Mr Poyser tells me she was not come when he left. They're afraid the letter has not reached her. It seems they had no exact address.'

Adam sat ruminating a little while, and then said, 'I wonder if Dinah 'ud ha' gone to see her. But perhaps the Poysers would ha' been sorely against it, since they won't come nigh her themselves. But I think she would, for the Methodists are great folks for going into the prisons; and Seth said he thought she would. She'd a very tender way with her, Dinah had; I wonder if she could ha' done any good. You never saw her, sir, did you?'

'Yes, I did. I had a conversation with her - she pleased me a good deal. And now you mention it, I wish she would come, for it is possible that a gentle mild woman like her might move Hetty to open her heart. The jail chaplain is rather harsh in his manner.'

'But it's o' no use if she doesn't come,' said Adam sadly.

'If I'd thought of it earlier, I would have taken some measures for finding her out,' said Mr Irwine, 'but it's too late now, I fear...Well, Adam, I must go now. Try to get some rest to-night. God bless you. I'll see you early to-morrow morning.'