

## Chapter LII - Adam And Dinah

IT was about three o'clock when Adam entered the farmyard and roused Alick and the dogs from their Sunday dozing. Alick said everybody was gone to church 'but th' young missis' - so he called Dinah - but this did not disappoint Adam, although the 'everybody' was so liberal as to include Nancy the dairymaid, whose works of necessity were not unfrequently incompatible with church-going.

There was perfect stillness about the house. The doors were all closed, and the very stones and tubs seemed quieter than usual. Adam heard the water gently dripping from the pump - that was the only sound - and he knocked at the house door rather softly, as was suitable in that stillness.

The door opened, and Dinah stood before him, colouring deeply with the great surprise of seeing Adam at this hour, when she knew it was his regular practice to be at church. Yesterday he would have said to her without any difficulty, 'I came to see you, Dinah: I knew the rest were not at home.' But to-day something prevented him from saying that, and he put out his hand to her in silence. Neither of them spoke, and yet both wished they could speak, as Adam entered, and they sat down. Dinah took the chair she had just left; it was at the corner of the table near the window, and there was a book lying on the table, but it was not open. She had been sitting perfectly still, looking at the small bit of clear fire in the bright grate. Adam sat down opposite her, in Mr Poyser's three-cornered chair.

'Your mother is not ill again, I hope, Adam?' Dinah said, recovering herself. 'Seth said she was well this morning.'

'No, she's very hearty to-day,' said Adam, happy in the signs of Dinah's feeling at the sight of him, but shy.

'There's nobody at home, you see,' Dinah said; 'but you'll wait. You've been hindered from going to church to-day, doubtless.'

'Yes,' Adam said, and then paused, before he added, 'I was thinking about you: that was the reason.'

This confession was very awkward and sudden, Adam felt, for he thought Dinah must understand all he meant. But the frankness of the words caused her immediately to interpret them into a renewal of his brotherly regrets that she was going away, and she answered calmly, 'Do not be careful and troubled for me, Adam. I have all things and abound at Snowfield. And my mind is at rest, for I am not seeking my own will in going.'

'But if things were different, Dinah,' said Adam, hesitatingly. 'If you knew things that perhaps you don't know now....'

Dinah looked at him inquiringly, but instead of going on, he reached a chair and brought it near the corner of the table where she was sitting. She wondered, and was afraid - and the next moment her thoughts flew to the past: was it something about those distant unhappy ones that she didn't know?

Adam looked at her. It was so sweet to look at her eyes, which had now a self-forgetful questioning in them - for a moment he forgot that he wanted to say anything, or that it was necessary to tell her what he meant.

'Dinah,' he said suddenly, taking both her hands between his, 'I love you with my whole heart and soul. I love you next to God who made me.'

Dinah's lips became pale, like her cheeks, and she trembled violently under the shock of painful joy. Her hands were cold as death between Adam's. She could not draw them away, because he held them fast.

'Don't tell me you can't love me, Dinah. Don't tell me we must part and pass our lives away from one another.'

The tears were trembling in Dinah's eyes, and they fell before she could answer. But she spoke in a quiet low voice.

'Yes, dear Adam, we must submit to another Will. We must part.'

'Not if you love me, Dinah - not if you love me,' Adam said passionately. 'Tell me - tell me if you can love me better than a brother?'

Dinah was too entirely reliant on the Supreme guidance to attempt to achieve any end by a deceptive concealment. She was recovering now from the first shock of emotion, and she looked at Adam with simple sincere eyes as she said, 'Yes, Adam, my heart is drawn strongly towards you; and of my own will, if I had no clear showing to the contrary, I could find my happiness in being near you and ministering to you continually. I fear I should forget to rejoice and weep with others; nay, I fear I should forget the Divine presence, and seek no love but yours.'

Adam did not speak immediately. They sat looking at each other in delicious silence - for the first sense of mutual love excludes other feelings; it will have the soul all to itself.

'Then, Dinah,' Adam said at last, 'how can there be anything contrary to what's right in our belonging to one another and spending our lives together? Who put this great love into our hearts? Can anything be holier than that? For we can help one another in everything as is good. I'd never think o' putting myself between you and God, and saying you oughtn't to do this and you oughtn't to do that. You'd follow your conscience as much as you do now.'

'Yes, Adam,' Dinah said, 'I know marriage is a holy state for those who are truly called to it, and have no other drawing; but from my childhood upwards I have been led towards another path; all my peace and my joy have come from having no life of my own, no wants, no wishes for myself, and living only in God and those of his creatures whose sorrows and joys he has given me to know. Those have been very blessed years to me, and I feel that if I was to listen to any voice that would draw me aside from that path, I should be turning my back on the light that has shone upon me, and darkness and doubt would take hold of me. We could not bless each other, Adam, if there were doubts in my soul, and if I yearned, when it was too late, after that better part which had once been given me and I had put away from me.'

'But if a new feeling has come into your mind, Dinah, and if you love me so as to be willing to be nearer to me than to other people, isn't that a sign that it's right for you to change your life? Doesn't the love make it right when nothing else would?'

'Adam, my mind is full of questionings about that; for now, since you tell me of your strong love towards me, what was clear to me has become dark again. I felt before that my heart was too strongly drawn towards you, and that your heart was not as mine; and the thought of you had taken hold of me, so that my soul had lost its freedom, and was becoming enslaved to an earthly affection, which made me anxious and careful about what should befall myself. For in all other affection I had been content with any small return, or with none; but my heart was beginning to hunger after an equal love from you. And I had no doubt that I must wrestle against that as a great temptation, and the command was clear that I must go away.'

'But now, dear, dear Dinah, now you know I love you better than you love me...it's all different now. You won't think o' going. You'll stay, and be my dear wife, and I shall thank God for giving me my life as I never thanked him before.'

'Adam, it's hard to me to turn a deaf ear...you know it's hard; but a great fear is upon me. It seems to me as if you were stretching out your arms to me, and beckoning me to come and take my ease and live for my own delight, and Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, was standing

looking towards me, and pointing to the sinful, and suffering, and afflicted. I have seen that again and again when I have been sitting in stillness and darkness, and a great terror has come upon me lest I should become hard, and a lover of self, and no more bear willingly the Redeemer's cross.'

Dinah had closed her eyes, and a faint shudder went through her. 'Adam,' she went on, 'you wouldn't desire that we should seek a good through any unfaithfulness to the light that is in us; you wouldn't believe that could be a good. We are of one mind in that.'

'Yes, Dinah,' said Adam sadly, 'I'll never be the man t' urge you against your conscience. But I can't give up the hope that you may come to see different. I don't believe your loving me could shut up your heart - it's only adding to what you've been before, not taking away from it. For it seems to me it's the same with love and happiness as with sorrow - the more we know of it the better we can feel what other people's lives are or might be, and so we shall only be more tender to 'em, and wishful to help 'em. The more knowledge a man has, the better he'll do's work; and feeling's a sort o' knowledge.'

Dinah was silent; her eyes were fixed in contemplation of something visible only to herself. Adam went on presently with his pleading, 'And you can do almost as much as you do now. I won't ask you to go to church with me of a Sunday. You shall go where you like among the people, and teach 'em; for though I like church best, I don't put my soul above yours, as if my words was better for you to follow than your own conscience. And you can help the sick just as much, and you'll have more means o' making 'em a bit comfortable; and you'll be among all your own friends as love you, and can help 'em and be a blessing to 'em till their dying day. Surely, Dinah, you'd be as near to God as if you was living lonely and away from me.'

Dinah made no answer for some time. Adam was still holding her hands and looking at her with almost trembling anxiety, when she turned her grave loving eyes on his and said, in rather a sad voice, 'Adam there is truth in what you say, and there's many of the brethren and sisters who have greater strength than I have, and find their hearts enlarged by the cares of husband and kindred. But I have not faith that it would be so with me, for since my affections have been set above measure on you, I have had less peace and joy in God. I have felt as it were a division in my heart. And think how it is with me, Adam. That life I have led is like a land I have trodden in blessedness since my childhood; and if I long for a moment to follow the voice which calls me to another land that I know not, I cannot but fear that my soul might hereafter yearn for that early blessedness which I had forsaken; and where doubt enters there is not perfect love. I must wait for clearer guidance. I must go from you, and we

must submit ourselves entirely to the Divine Will. We are sometimes required to lay our natural lawful affections on the altar.'

Adam dared not plead again, for Dinah's was not the voice of caprice or insincerity. But it was very hard for him; his eyes got dim as he looked at her.

'But you may come to feel satisfied...to feel that you may come to me again, and we may never part, Dinah?'

'We must submit ourselves, Adam. With time, our duty will be made clear. It may be when I have entered on my former life, I shall find all these new thoughts and wishes vanish, and become as things that were not. Then I shall know that my calling is not towards marriage. But we must wait.'

'Dinah,' said Adam mournfully, 'you can't love me so well as I love you, else you'd have no doubts. But it's natural you shouldn't, for I'm not so good as you. I can't doubt it's right for me to love the best thing God's ever given me to know.'

'Nay, Adam. It seems to me that my love for you is not weak, for my heart waits on your words and looks, almost as a little child waits on the help and tenderness of the strong on whom it depends. If the thought of you took slight hold of me, I should not fear that it would be an idol in the temple. But you will strengthen me - you will not hinder me in seeking to obey to the uttermost.'

'Let us go out into the sunshine, Dinah, and walk together. I'll speak no word to disturb you.'

They went out and walked towards the fields, where they would meet the family coming from church. Adam said, 'Take my arm, Dinah,' and she took it. That was the only change in their manner to each other since they were last walking together. But no sadness in the prospect of her going away - in the uncertainty of the issue - could rob the sweetness from Adam's sense that Dinah loved him. He thought he would stay at the Hall Farm all that evening. He would be near her as long as he could.

'Hey-day! There's Adam along wi' Dinah,' said Mr Poyser, as he opened the far gate into the Home Close. 'I couldna think how he happened away from church. Why,' added good Martin, after a moment's pause, 'what dost think has just jumped into my head?'

'Summat as hadna far to jump, for it's just under our nose. You mean as Adam's fond o' Dinah.'

'Aye! hast ever had any notion of it before?'

'To be sure I have,' said Mrs. Poyser, who always declined, if possible, to be taken by surprise. 'I'm not one o' those as can see the cat i' the dairy an' wonder what she's come after.'

'Thee never saidst a word to me about it.'

'Well, I aren't like a bird-clapper, forced to make a rattle when the wind blows on me. I can keep my own counsel when there's no good i' speaking.'

'But Dinah 'll ha' none o' him. Dost think she will?'

'Nay,' said Mrs. Poyser, not sufficiently on her guard against a possible surprise, 'she'll never marry anybody, if he isn't a Methodist and a cripple.'

'It 'ud ha' been a pretty thing though for 'em t' marry,' said Martin, turning his head on one side, as if in pleased contemplation of his new idea. 'Thee'dst ha' liked it too, wouldstna?'

'Ah! I should. I should ha' been sure of her then, as she wouldn't go away from me to Snowfield, welly thirty mile off, and me not got a creatur to look to, only neighbours, as are no kin to me, an' most of 'em women as I'd be ashamed to show my face, if my dairy things war like their'n. There may well be streaky butter i' the market. An' I should be glad to see the poor thing settled like a Christian woman, with a house of her own over her head; and we'd stock her well wi' linen and feathers, for I love her next to my own children. An' she makes one feel safer when she's i' the house, for she's like the driven snow: anybody might sin for two as had her at their elbow.'

'Dinah,' said Tommy, running forward to meet her, 'mother says you'll never marry anybody but a Methodist cripple. What a silly you must be!' a comment which Tommy followed up by seizing Dinah with both arms, and dancing along by her side with incommensurate fondness.

'Why, Adam, we missed you i' the singing to-day,' said Mr Poyser. 'How was it?'

'I wanted to see Dinah - she's going away so soon,' said Adam.

'Ah, lad! Can you persuade her to stop somehow? Find her a good husband somewhere i' the parish. If you'll do that, we'll forgive you for missing church. But, anyway, she isna going before the harvest supper o' Wednesday, and you must come then. There's Bartle Massey

comin', an' happen Craig. You'll be sure an' come, now, at seven? The missis wanna have it a bit later.'

'Aye,' said Adam, 'I'll come if I can. But I can't often say what I'll do beforehand, for the work often holds me longer than I expect. You'll stay till the end o' the week, Dinah?'

'Yes, yes!' said Mr Poyser. 'We'll have no nay.'

'She's no call to be in a hurry,' observed Mrs. Poyser. 'Scarceness o' victual 'ull keep: there's no need to be hasty wi' the cooking. An' scarceness is what there's the biggest stock of i' that country.'

Dinah smiled, but gave no promise to stay, and they talked of other things through the rest of the walk, lingering in the sunshine to look at the great flock of geese grazing, at the new corn-ricks, and at the surprising abundance of fruit on the old pear-tree; Nancy and Molly having already hastened home, side by side, each holding, carefully wrapped in her pocket-handkerchief, a prayer-book, in which she could read little beyond the large letters and the Amens.

Surely all other leisure is hurry compared with a sunny walk through the fields from 'afternoon church' - as such walks used to be in those old leisurely times, when the boat, gliding sleepily along the canal, was the newest locomotive wonder; when Sunday books had most of them old brown-leather covers, and opened with remarkable precision always in one place. Leisure is gone - gone where the spinning-wheels are gone, and the pack-horses, and the slow waggons, and the pedlars, who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons. Ingenious philosophers tell you, perhaps, that the great work of the steam-engine is to create leisure for mankind. Do not believe them: it only creates a vacuum for eager thought to rush in. Even idleness is eager now - eager for amusement; prone to excursion-trains, art museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels; prone even to scientific theorizing and cursory peeps through microscopes. Old Leisure was quite a different personage. He only read one newspaper, innocent of leaders, and was free from that periodicity of sensations which we call post-time. He was a contemplative, rather stout gentleman, of excellent digestion; of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis; happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring the things themselves. He lived chiefly in the country, among pleasant seats and homesteads, and was fond of sauntering by the fruit-tree wall and scenting the apricots when they were warmed by the morning sunshine, or of sheltering himself under the orchard boughs at noon, when the summer pears were falling. He knew nothing of weekday services, and thought none the worse of the Sunday sermon if it allowed him to sleep from the text to the blessing; liking the afternoon service best, because the prayers were the

shortest, and not ashamed to say so; for he had an easy, jolly conscience, broad-backed like himself, and able to carry a great deal of beer or port-wine, not being made squeamish by doubts and qualms and lofty aspirations. Life was not a task to him, but a sinecure. He fingered the guineas in his pocket, and ate his dinners, and slept the sleep of the irresponsible, for had he not kept up his character by going to church on the Sunday afternoons?

Fine old Leisure! Do not be severe upon him, and judge him by our modern standard. He never went to Exeter Hall, or heard a popular preacher, or read Tracts for the Times or Sartor Resartus.