

## Chapter LV - Marriage Bells

IN little more than a month after that meeting on the hill - on a rimy morning in departing November - Adam and Dinah were married.

It was an event much thought of in the village. All Mr Burge's men had a holiday, and all Mr Poyser's, and most of those who had a holiday appeared in their best clothes at the wedding. I think there was hardly an inhabitant of Hayslope specially mentioned in this history and still resident in the parish on this November morning who was not either in church to see Adam and Dinah married, or near the church door to greet them as they came forth. Mrs. Irwine and her daughters were waiting at the churchyard gates in their carriage (for they had a carriage now) to shake hands with the bride and bridegroom and wish them well; and in the absence of Miss Lydia Donnithorne at Bath, Mrs. Best, Mr Mills, and Mr Craig had felt it incumbent on them to represent 'the family' at the Chase on the occasion. The churchyard walk was quite lined with familiar faces, many of them faces that had first looked at Dinah when she preached on the Green. And no wonder they showed this eager interest on her marriage morning, for nothing like Dinah and the history which had brought her and Adam Bede together had been known at Hayslope within the memory of man.

Bessy Cranage, in her neatest cap and frock, was crying, though she did not exactly know why; for, as her cousin Wiry Ben, who stood near her, judiciously suggested, Dinah was not going away, and if Bessy was in low spirits, the best thing for her to do was to follow Dinah's example and marry an honest fellow who was ready to have her. Next to Bessy, just within the church door, there were the Poyser children, peeping round the corner of the pews to get a sight of the mysterious ceremony; Totty's face wearing an unusual air of anxiety at the idea of seeing cousin Dinah come back looking rather old, for in Totty's experience no married people were young.

I envy them all the sight they had when the marriage was fairly ended and Adam led Dinah out of church. She was not in black this morning, for her Aunt Poyser would by no means allow such a risk of incurring bad luck, and had herself made a present of the wedding dress, made all of grey, though in the usual Quaker form, for on this point Dinah could not give way. So the lily face looked out with sweet gravity from under a grey Quaker bonnet, neither smiling nor blushing, but with lips trembling a little under the weight of solemn feelings. Adam, as he pressed her arm to his side, walked with his old erectness and his head thrown rather backward as if to face all the world better. But it was not because he was particularly proud this morning, as is the wont of bridegrooms, for his happiness was of a

kind that had little reference to men's opinion of it. There was a tinge of sadness in his deep joy; Dinah knew it, and did not feel aggrieved.

There were three other couples, following the bride and bridegroom: first, Martin Poyser, looking as cheery as a bright fire on this rimy morning, led quiet Mary Burge, the bridesmaid; then came Seth serenely happy, with Mrs. Poyser on his arm; and last of all Bartle Massey, with Lisbeth - Lisbeth in a new gown and bonnet, too busy with her pride in her son and her delight in possessing the one daughter she had desired to devise a single pretext for complaint.

Bartle Massey had consented to attend the wedding at Adam's earnest request, under protest against marriage in general and the marriage of a sensible man in particular. Nevertheless, Mr Poyser had a joke against him after the wedding dinner, to the effect that in the vestry he had given the bride one more kiss than was necessary.

Behind this last couple came Mr Irwine, glad at heart over this good morning's work of joining Adam and Dinah. For he had seen Adam in the worst moments of his sorrow; and what better harvest from that painful seed-time could there be than this? The love that had brought hope and comfort in the hour of despair, the love that had found its way to the dark prison cell and to poor Hetty's darker soul - this strong gentle love was to be Adam's companion and helper till death.

There was much shaking of hands mingled with 'God bless you's' and other good wishes to the four couples, at the churchyard gate, Mr Poyser answering for the rest with unwonted vivacity of tongue, for he had all the appropriate wedding-day jokes at his command. And the women, he observed, could never do anything but put finger in eye at a wedding. Even Mrs. Poyser could not trust herself to speak as the neighbours shook hands with her, and Lisbeth began to cry in the face of the very first person who told her she was getting young again.

Mr Joshua Rann, having a slight touch of rheumatism, did not join in the ringing of the bells this morning, and, looking on with some contempt at these informal greetings which required no official co-operation from the clerk, began to hum in his musical bass, 'Oh what a joyful thing it is,' by way of preluding a little to the effect he intended to produce in the wedding psalm next Sunday.

'That's a bit of good news to cheer Arthur,' said Mr Irwine to his mother, as they drove off. 'I shall write to him the first thing when we get home.'

## **Epilogue**

IT is near the end of June, in 1807. The workshops have been shut up half an hour or more in Adam Bede's timber-yard, which used to be Jonathan Burge's, and the mellow evening light is falling on the pleasant house with the buff walls and the soft grey thatch, very much as it did when we saw Adam bringing in the keys on that June evening nine years ago.

There is a figure we know well, just come out of the house, and shading her eyes with her hands as she looks for something in the distance, for the rays that fall on her white borderless cap and her pale auburn hair are very dazzling. But now she turns away from the sunlight and looks towards the door.

We can see the sweet pale face quite well now: it is scarcely at all altered - only a little fuller, to correspond to her more matronly figure, which still seems light and active enough in the plain black dress.

'I see him, Seth,' Dinah said, as she looked into the house. 'Let us go and meet him. Come, Lisbeth, come with Mother.'

The last call was answered immediately by a small fair creature with pale auburn hair and grey eyes, little more than four years old, who ran out silently and put her hand into her mother's.

'Come, Uncle Seth,' said Dinah.

'Aye, aye, we're coming,' Seth answered from within, and presently appeared stooping under the doorway, being taller than usual by the black head of a sturdy two-year-old nephew, who had caused some delay by demanding to be carried on uncle's shoulder.

'Better take him on thy arm, Seth,' said Dinah, looking fondly at the stout black-eyed fellow. 'He's troublesome to thee so.'

'Nay, nay: Addy likes a ride on my shoulder. I can carry him so for a bit.' A kindness which young Addy acknowledged by drumming his heels with promising force against Uncle Seth's chest. But to walk by Dinah's side, and be tyrannized over by Dinah's and Adam's children, was Uncle Seth's earthly happiness.

'Where didst see him?' asked Seth, as they walked on into the adjoining field. 'I can't catch sight of him anywhere.'

'Between the hedges by the roadside,' said Dinah. 'I saw his hat and his shoulder. There he is again.'

'Trust thee for catching sight of him if he's anywhere to be seen,' said Seth, smiling. 'Thee't like poor mother used to be. She was always on

the look out for Adam, and could see him sooner than other folks, for all her eyes got dim.'

'He's been longer than he expected,' said Dinah, taking Arthur's watch from a small side pocket and looking at it; 'it's nigh upon seven now.'

'Aye, they'd have a deal to say to one another,' said Seth, 'and the meeting 'ud touch 'em both pretty closish. Why, it's getting on towards eight years since they parted.'

'Yes,' said Dinah, 'Adam was greatly moved this morning at the thought of the change he should see in the poor young man, from the sickness he has undergone, as well as the years which have changed us all. And the death of the poor wanderer, when she was coming back to us, has been sorrow upon sorrow.'

'See, Addy,' said Seth, lowering the young one to his arm now and pointing, 'there's Father coming - at the far stile.'

Dinah hastened her steps, and little Lisbeth ran on at her utmost speed till she clasped her father's leg. Adam patted her head and lifted her up to kiss her, but Dinah could see the marks of agitation on his face as she approached him, and he put her arm within his in silence.

'Well, youngster, must I take you?' he said, trying to smile, when Addy stretched out his arms - ready, with the usual baseness of infancy, to give up his Uncle Seth at once, now there was some rarer patronage at hand.

'It's cut me a good deal, Dinah,' Adam said at last, when they were walking on.

'Didst find him greatly altered?' said Dinah.

'Why, he's altered and yet not altered. I should ha' known him anywhere. But his colour's changed, and he looks sadly. However, the doctors say he'll soon be set right in his own country air. He's all sound in th' inside; it's only the fever shattered him so. But he speaks just the same, and smiles at me just as he did when he was a lad. It's wonderful how he's always had just the same sort o' look when he smiles.'

'I've never seen him smile, poor young man,' said Dinah.

'But thee wilt see him smile, to-morrow,' said Adam. 'He asked after thee the first thing when he began to come round, and we could talk to one another. 'I hope she isn't altered,' he said, 'I remember her face so well.' I told him 'no,' Adam continued, looking fondly at the eyes

that were turned towards his, 'only a bit plumper, as thee'dst a right to be after seven year. 'I may come and see her to-morrow, mayn't I?' he said; 'I long to tell her how I've thought of her all these years.'

'Didst tell him I'd always used the watch?' said Dinah.

'Aye; and we talked a deal about thee, for he says he never saw a woman a bit like thee. 'I shall turn Methodist some day,' he said, 'when she preaches out of doors, and go to hear her.' And I said, 'Nay, sir, you can't do that, for Conference has forbid the women preaching, and she's given it up, all but talking to the people a bit in their houses.'

'Ah,' said Seth, who could not repress a comment on this point, 'and a sore pity it was o' Conference; and if Dinah had seen as I did, we'd ha' left the Wesleyans and joined a body that 'ud put no bonds on Christian liberty.'

'Nay, lad, nay,' said Adam, 'she was right and thee wast wrong. There's no rules so wise but what it's a pity for somebody or other. Most o' the women do more harm nor good with their preaching - they've not got Dinah's gift nor her sperrit - and she's seen that, and she thought it right to set th' example o' submitting, for she's not held from other sorts o' teaching. And I agree with her, and approve o' what she did.'

Seth was silent. This was a standing subject of difference rarely alluded to, and Dinah, wishing to quit it at once, said, 'Didst remember, Adam, to speak to Colonel Donnithorne the words my uncle and aunt entrusted to thee?'

'Yes, and he's going to the Hall Farm with Mr Irwine the day after to-morrow. Mr Irwine came in while we were talking about it, and he would have it as the Colonel must see nobody but thee to-morrow. He said - and he's in the right of it - as it'll be bad for him t' have his feelings stirred with seeing many people one after another. 'We must get you strong and hearty,' he said, 'that's the first thing to be done Arthur, and then you shall have your own way. But I shall keep you under your old tutor's thumb till then.' Mr Irwine's fine and joyful at having him home again.'

Adam was silent a little while, and then said, 'It was very cutting when we first saw one another. He'd never heard about poor Hetty till Mr Irwine met him in London, for the letters missed him on his journey. The first thing he said to me, when we'd got hold o' one another's hands was, 'I could never do anything for her, Adam - she lived long enough for all the suffering - and I'd thought so of the time when I

might do something for her. But you told me the truth when you said to me once, 'There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for.'"

'Why, there's Mr and Mrs. Poyser coming in at the yard gate,' said Seth.

'So there is,' said Dinah. 'Run, Lisbeth, run to meet Aunt Poyser. Come in, Adam, and rest; it has been a hard day for thee.'

**The End**