

## 12. ARROWTHORNE PARK AND LODGE

Summer was just over when Christopher Julian found himself rattling along in the train to Sandbourne on some trifling business appertaining to his late father's affairs, which would afford him an excuse for calling at Arrowthorne about the song of hers that he wished to produce. He alighted in the afternoon at a little station some twenty miles short of Sandbourne, and leaving his portmanteau behind him there, decided to walk across the fields, obtain if possible the interview with the lady, and return then to the station to finish the journey to Sandbourne, which he could thus reach at a convenient hour in the evening, and, if he chose, take leave of again the next day.

It was an afternoon which had a fungous smell out of doors, all being sunless and stagnant overhead and around. The various species of trees had begun to assume the more distinctive colours of their decline, and where there had been one pervasive green were now twenty greenish yellows, the air in the vistas between them being half opaque with blue exhalation. Christopher in his walk overtook a countryman, and inquired if the path they were following would lead him to Arrowthorne Lodge.

"'Twill take 'ee into Arr'thorne Park,' the man replied. 'But you won't come anigh the Lodge, unless you bear round to the left as might be.'

'Mrs. Petherwin lives there, I believe?'

'No, sir. Leastwise unless she's but lately come. I have never heard of such a woman.'

'She may possibly be only visiting there.'

'Ah, perhaps that's the shape o't. Well, now you tell o't, I have seen a strange face thereabouts once or twice lately. A young good-looking maid enough, seemingly.'

'Yes, she's considered a very handsome lady.'

'I've heard the woodmen say, now that you tell o't, that they meet her every now and then, just at the closing in of the day, as they come home along with their nitches of sticks; ay, stalking about under the trees by herself--a tall black martel, so long-legged and awful-like that you'd think 'twas the old feller himself a-coming, they say. Now a woman must be a queer body to my thinking, to roam about by night so lonesome and that? Ay, now that you tell o't, there is such a woman, but 'a never have showed in the parish; sure I never thought who the body was--no, not once about her, nor where 'a was living and that--not I, till you spoke. Well, there, sir, that's Arr'thorne Lodge; do you see they three elms?' He pointed across the glade towards some confused foliage a long way off.

'I am not sure about the sort of tree you mean,' said Christopher, 'I see

a number of trees with edges shaped like edges of clouds.'

'Ay, ay, they be oaks; I mean the elms to the left hand.'

'But a man can hardly tell oaks from elms at that distance, my good fellow!'

'That 'a can very well--leastwise, if he's got the sense.'

'Well, I think I see what you mean,' said Christopher. 'What next?'

'When you get there, you bear away smart to nor'-west, and you'll come straight as a line to the Lodge.'

'How the deuce am I to know which is north-west in a strange place, with no sun to tell me?'

'What, not know nor-west? Well, I should think a boy could never live and grow up to be a man without knowing the four quarters. I knowed 'em when I was a mossel of a chiel. We be no great scholars here, that's true, but there isn't a Tom-rig or Jack-straw in these parts that don't know where they lie as well as I. Now I've lived, man and boy, these eight-and-sixty years, and never met a man in my life afore who hadn't learnt such a common thing as the four quarters.'

Christopher parted from his companion and soon reached a stile,

clambering over which he entered a park. Here he threaded his way, and rounding a clump of aged trees the young man came in view of a light and elegant country-house in the half-timbered Gothic style of the late revival, apparently only a few years old. Surprised at finding himself so near, Christopher's heart fluttered unmanageably till he had taken an abstract view of his position, and, in impatience at his want of nerve, adopted a sombre train of reasoning to convince himself that, far from indulgence in the passion of love bringing bliss, it was a folly, leading to grief and disquiet--certainly one which would do him no good. Cooled down by this, he stepped into the drive and went up to the house.

'Is Mrs. Petherwin at home?' he said modestly.

'Who did you say, sir?'

He repeated the name.

'Don't know the person.'

'The lady may be a visitor--I call on business.'

'She is not visiting in this house, sir.'

'Is not this Arrowthorne Lodge?'

'Certainly not.'

'Then where is Arrowthorne Lodge, please?'

'Well, it is nearly a mile from here. Under the trees by the high-road. If you go across by that footpath it will bring you out quicker than by following the bend of the drive.'

Christopher wondered how he could have managed to get into the wrong park; but, setting it down to his ignorance of the difference between oak and elm, he immediately retraced his steps, passing across the park again, through the gate at the end of the drive, and into the turnpike road. No other gate, park, or country seat of any description was within view.

'Can you tell me the way to Arrowthorne Lodge?' he inquired of the first person he met, who was a little girl.

'You are just coming away from it, sir,' said she. 'I'll show you; I am going that way.'

They walked along together. Getting abreast the entrance of the park he had just emerged from, the child said, 'There it is, sir; I live there too.'

Christopher, with a dazed countenance, looked towards a cottage which stood nestling in the shrubbery and ivy like a mushroom among grass. 'Is

that Arrowthorne Lodge?' he repeated.

'Yes, and if you go up the drive, you come to Arrowthorne House.'

'Arrowthorne Lodge--where Mrs. Petherwin lives, I mean.'

'Yes. She lives there along wi' mother and we. But she don't want anybody to know it, sir, cause she's celebrate, and 'twouldn't do at all.'

Christopher said no more, and the little girl became interested in the products of the bank and ditch by the wayside. He left her, pushed open the heavy gate, and tapped at the Lodge door.

The latch was lifted. 'Does Mrs. Petherwin,' he began, and, determined that there should be no mistake, repeated, 'Does Mrs. Ethelberta Petherwin, the poetess, live here?' turning full upon the person who opened the door.

'She does, sir,' said a faltering voice; and he found himself face to face with the pupil-teacher of Sandbourne.