

## Chapter IV

1st Gent. Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves. 2d Gent. Ay, truly: but I think it is the world That brings the iron.

‘Sir James seems determined to do everything you wish,’ said Celia, as they were driving home from an inspection of the new building-site.

‘He is a good creature, and more sensible than any one would imagine,’ said Dorothea, inconsiderately.

‘You mean that he appears silly.’

‘No, no,’ said Dorothea, recollecting herself, and laying her hand on her sister’s a moment, ‘but he does not talk equally well on all subjects.’

‘I should think none but disagreeable people do,’ said Celia, in her usual purring way. ‘They must be very dreadful to live with. Only think! at breakfast, and always.’

Dorothea laughed. ‘O Kitty, you are a wonderful creature!’ She pinched Celia’s chin, being in the mood now to think her very winning and lovely - fit hereafter to be an eternal cherub, and if it were not doctrinally wrong to say so, hardly more in need of salvation than a squirrel. ‘Of course people need not be always talking well. Only one tells the quality of their minds when they try to talk well.’

‘You mean that Sir James tries and fails.’

‘I was speaking generally. Why do you catechise me about Sir James? It is not the object of his life to please me.’

‘Now, Dodo, can you really believe that?’

‘Certainly. He thinks of me as a future sister - that is all.’ Dorothea had never hinted this before, waiting, from a certain shyness on such subjects which was mutual between the sisters, until it should be introduced by some decisive event. Celia blushed, but said at once -

‘Pray do not make that mistake any longer, Dodo. When Tantripp was brushing my hair the other day, she said that Sir James’s man knew from Mrs Cadwallader’s maid that Sir James was to marry the eldest Miss Brooke.’

‘How can you let Tantripp talk such gossip to you, Celia?’ said Dorothea, indignantly, not the less angry because details asleep in her

memory were now awakened to confirm the unwelcome revelation. 'You must have asked her questions. It is degrading.'

'I see no harm at all in Tantripp's talking to me. It is better to hear what people say. You see what mistakes you make by taking up notions. I am quite sure that Sir James means to make you an offer; and he believes that you will accept him, especially since you have been so pleased with him about the plans. And uncle too - I know he expects it. Every one can see that Sir James is very much in love with you.'

The revulsion was so strong and painful in Dorothea's mind that the tears welled up and flowed abundantly. All her dear plans were embittered, and she thought with disgust of Sir James's conceiving that she recognized him as her lover. There was vexation too on account of Celia.

'How could he expect it?' she burst forth in her most impetuous manner. 'I have never agreed with him about anything but the cottages: I was barely polite to him before.'

'But you have been so pleased with him since then; he has begun to feel quite sure that you are fond of him.'

'Fond of him, Celia! How can you choose such odious expressions?' said Dorothea, passionately.

'Dear me, Dorothea, I suppose it would be right for you to be fond of a man whom you accepted for a husband.'

'It is offensive to me to say that Sir James could think I was fond of him. Besides, it is not the right word for the feeling I must have towards the man I would accept as a husband.'

'Well, I am sorry for Sir James. I thought it right to tell you, because you went on as you always do, never looking just where you are, and treading in the wrong place. You always see what nobody else sees; it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you never see what is quite plain. That's your way, Dodo.' Something certainly gave Celia unusual courage; and she was not sparing the sister of whom she was occasionally in awe. Who can tell what just criticisms Murr the Cat may be passing on us beings of wider speculation?

'It is very painful,' said Dorothea, feeling scourged. 'I can have no more to do with the cottages. I must be uncivil to him. I must tell him I will have nothing to do with them. It is very painful.' Her eyes filled again with tears.

'Wait a little. Think about it. You know he is going away for a day or two to see his sister. There will be nobody besides Lovegood.' Celia could not help relenting. 'Poor Dodo,' she went on, in an amiable staccato. 'It is very hard: it is your favorite *fad* to draw plans.'

'*Fad* to draw plans! Do you think I only care about my fellow-creatures' houses in that childish way? I may well make mistakes. How can one ever do anything nobly Christian, living among people with such petty thoughts?'

No more was said; Dorothea was too much jarred to recover her temper and behave so as to show that she admitted any error in herself. She was disposed rather to accuse the intolerable narrowness and the purblind conscience of the society around her: and Celia was no longer the eternal cherub, but a thorn in her spirit, a pink-and-white nullifidian, worse than any discouraging presence in the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' The *fad* of drawing plans! What was life worth - what great faith was possible when the whole effect of one's actions could be withered up into such parched rubbish as that? When she got out of the carriage, her cheeks were pale and her eyelids red. She was an image of sorrow, and her uncle who met her in the hall would have been alarmed, if Celia had not been close to her looking so pretty and composed, that he at once concluded Dorothea's tears to have their origin in her excessive religiousness. He had returned, during their absence, from a journey to the county town, about a petition for the pardon of some criminal.

'Well, my dears,' he said, kindly, as they went up to kiss him, 'I hope nothing disagreeable has happened while I have been away.'

'No, uncle,' said Celia, 'we have been to Freshitt to look at the cottages. We thought you would have been at home to lunch.'

'I came by Lowick to lunch - you didn't know I came by Lowick. And I have brought a couple of pamphlets for you, Dorothea - in the library, you know; they lie on the table in the library.'

It seemed as if an electric stream went through Dorothea, thrilling her from despair into expectation. They were pamphlets about the early Church. The oppression of Celia, Tantripp, and Sir James was shaken off, and she walked straight to the library. Celia went up-stairs. Mr Brooke was detained by a message, but when he re-entered the library, he found Dorothea seated and already deep in one of the pamphlets which had some marginal manuscript of Mr Casaubon's, - taking it in as eagerly as she might have taken in the scent of a fresh bouquet after a dry, hot, dreary walk.

She was getting away from Tipton and Freshitt, and her own sad liability to tread in the wrong places on her way to the New Jerusalem.

Mr Brooke sat down in his arm-chair, stretched his legs towards the wood-fire, which had fallen into a wondrous mass of glowing dice between the dogs, and rubbed his hands gently, looking very mildly towards Dorothea, but with a neutral leisurely air, as if he had nothing particular to say. Dorothea closed her pamphlet, as soon as she was aware of her uncle's presence, and rose as if to go. Usually she would have been interested about her uncle's merciful errand on behalf of the criminal, but her late agitation had made her absent-minded.

'I came back by Lowick, you know,' said Mr Brooke, not as if with any intention to arrest her departure, but apparently from his usual tendency to say what he had said before. This fundamental principle of human speech was markedly exhibited in Mr Brooke. 'I lunched there and saw Casaubon's library, and that kind of thing. There's a sharp air, driving. Won't you sit down, my dear? You look cold.'

Dorothea felt quite inclined to accept the invitation. Some times, when her uncle's easy way of taking things did not happen to be exasperating, it was rather soothing. She threw off her mantle and bonnet, and sat down opposite to him, enjoying the glow, but lifting up her beautiful hands for a screen. They were not thin hands, or small hands; but powerful, feminine, maternal hands. She seemed to be holding them up in propitiation for her passionate desire to know and to think, which in the unfriendly mediums of Tipton and Freshitt had issued in crying and red eyelids.

She bethought herself now of the condemned criminal. 'What news have you brought about the sheep-stealer, uncle?'

'What, poor Bunch? - well, it seems we can't get him off - he is to be hanged.'

Dorothea's brow took an expression of reprobation and pity.

'Hanged, you know,' said Mr Brooke, with a quiet nod. 'Poor Romilly! he would have helped us. I knew Romilly. Casaubon didn't know Romilly. He is a little buried in books, you know, Casaubon is.'

'When a man has great studies and is writing a great work, he must of course give up seeing much of the world. How can he go about making acquaintances?'

'That's true. But a man mopes, you know. I have always been a bachelor too, but I have that sort of disposition that I never moped; it

was my way to go about everywhere and take in everything. I never moped: but I can see that Casaubon does, you know. He wants a companion - a companion, you know.'

'It would be a great honor to any one to be his companion,' said Dorothea, energetically.

'You like him, eh?' said Mr Brooke, without showing any surprise, or other emotion. 'Well, now, I've known Casaubon ten years, ever since he came to Lowick. But I never got anything out of him - any ideas, you know. However, he is a tiptop man and may be a bishop - that kind of thing, you know, if Peel stays in. And he has a very high opinion of you, my dear.'

Dorothea could not speak.

'The fact is, he has a very high opinion indeed of you. And he speaks uncommonly well - does Casaubon. He has deferred to me, you not being of age. In short, I have promised to speak to you, though I told him I thought there was not much chance. I was bound to tell him that. I said, my niece is very young, and that kind of thing. But I didn't think it necessary to go into everything. However, the long and the short of it is, that he has asked my permission to make you an offer of marriage - of marriage, you know,' said Mr Brooke, with his explanatory nod. 'I thought it better to tell you, my dear.'

No one could have detected any anxiety in Mr Brooke's manner, but he did really wish to know something of his niece's mind, that, if there were any need for advice, he might give it in time. What feeling he, as a magistrate who had taken in so many ideas, could make room for, was unmingledly kind. Since Dorothea did not speak immediately, he repeated, 'I thought it better to tell you, my dear.'

'Thank you, uncle,' said Dorothea, in a clear unwavering tone. 'I am very grateful to Mr Casaubon. If he makes me an offer, I shall accept him. I admire and honor him more than any man I ever saw.'

Mr Brooke paused a little, and then said in a lingering low tone, 'Ah? . . . Well! He is a good match in some respects. But now, Chettam is a good match. And our land lies together. I shall never interfere against your wishes, my dear. People should have their own way in marriage, and that sort of thing - up to a certain point, you know. I have always said that, up to a certain point. I wish you to marry well; and I have good reason to believe that Chettam wishes to marry you. I mention it, you know.'

'It is impossible that I should ever marry Sir James Chettam,' said Dorothea. 'If he thinks of marrying me, he has made a great mistake.'

'That is it, you see. One never knows. I should have thought Chettam was just the sort of man a woman would like, now.'

'Pray do not mention him in that light again, uncle,' said Dorothea, feeling some of her late irritation revive.

Mr Brooke wondered, and felt that women were an inexhaustible subject of study, since even he at his age was not in a perfect state of scientific prediction about them. Here was a fellow like Chettam with no chance at all.

'Well, but Casaubon, now. There is no hurry - I mean for you. It's true, every year will tell upon him. He is over five-and-forty, you know. I should say a good seven-and-twenty years older than you. To be sure, - if you like learning and standing, and that sort of thing, we can't have everything. And his income is good - he has a handsome property independent of the Church - his income is good. Still he is not young, and I must not conceal from you, my dear, that I think his health is not over-strong. I know nothing else against him.'

'I should not wish to have a husband very near my own age,' said Dorothea, with grave decision. 'I should wish to have a husband who was above me in judgment and in all knowledge.'

Mr Brooke repeated his subdued, 'Ah? - I thought you had more of your own opinion than most girls. I thought you liked your own opinion - liked it, you know.'

'I cannot imagine myself living without some opinions, but I should wish to have good reasons for them, and a wise man could help me to see which opinions had the best foundation, and would help me to live according to them.'

'Very true. You couldn't put the thing better - couldn't put it better, beforehand, you know. But there are oddities in things,' continued Mr Brooke, whose conscience was really roused to do the best he could for his niece on this occasion. 'Life isn't cast in a mould - not cut out by rule and line, and that sort of thing. I never married myself, and it will be the better for you and yours. The fact is, I never loved any one well enough to put myself into a noose for them. It is a noose, you know. Temper, now. There is temper. And a husband likes to be master.'

'I know that I must expect trials, uncle. Marriage is a state of higher duties. I never thought of it as mere personal ease,' said poor Dorothea.

'Well, you are not fond of show, a great establishment, balls, dinners, that kind of thing. I can see that Casaubon's ways might suit you better than Chettam's. And you shall do as you like, my dear. I would not hinder Casaubon; I said so at once; for there is no knowing how anything may turn out. You have not the same tastes as every young lady; and a clergyman and scholar - who may be a bishop - that kind of thing - may suit you better than Chettam. Chettam is a good fellow, a good sound-hearted fellow, you know; but he doesn't go much into ideas. I did, when I was his age. But Casaubon's eyes, now. I think he has hurt them a little with too much reading.'

'I should be all the happier, uncle, the more room there was for me to help him,' said Dorothea, ardently.

'You have quite made up your mind, I see. Well, my dear, the fact is, I have a letter for you in my pocket.' Mr Brooke handed the letter to Dorothea, but as she rose to go away, he added, 'There is not too much hurry, my dear. Think about it, you know.'

When Dorothea had left him, he reflected that he had certainly spoken strongly: he had put the risks of marriage before her in a striking manner. It was his duty to do so. But as to pretending to be wise for young people, - no uncle, however much he had travelled in his youth, absorbed the new ideas, and dined with celebrities now deceased, could pretend to judge what sort of marriage would turn out well for a young girl who preferred Casaubon to Chettam. In short, woman was a problem which, since Mr Brooke's mind felt blank before it, could be hardly less complicated than the revolutions of an irregular solid.