

## Chapter VIII

'Oh, rescue her! I am her brother now, And you her father. Every gentle maid Should have a guardian in each gentleman.'

It was wonderful to Sir James Chettam how well he continued to like going to the Grange after he had once encountered the difficulty of seeing Dorothea for the first time in the light of a woman who was engaged to another man. Of course the forked lightning seemed to pass through him when he first approached her, and he remained conscious throughout the interview of hiding uneasiness; but, good as he was, it must be owned that his uneasiness was less than it would have been if he had thought his rival a brilliant and desirable match. He had no sense of being eclipsed by Mr Casaubon; he was only shocked that Dorothea was under a melancholy illusion, and his mortification lost some of its bitterness by being mingled with compassion.

Nevertheless, while Sir James said to himself that he had completely resigned her, since with the perversity of a Desdemona she had not affected a proposed match that was clearly suitable and according to nature; he could not yet be quite passive under the idea of her engagement to Mr Casaubon. On the day when he first saw them together in the light of his present knowledge, it seemed to him that he had not taken the affair seriously enough. Brooke was really culpable; he ought to have hindered it. Who could speak to him? Something might be done perhaps even now, at least to defer the marriage. On his way home he turned into the Rectory and asked for Mr Cadwallader. Happily, the Rector was at home, and his visitor was shown into the study, where all the fishing tackle hung. But he himself was in a little room adjoining, at work with his turning apparatus, and he called to the baronet to join him there. The two were better friends than any other landholder and clergyman in the county - a significant fact which was in agreement with the amiable expression of their faces.

Mr Cadwallader was a large man, with full lips and a sweet smile; very plain and rough in his exterior, but with that solid imperturbable ease and good-humor which is infectious, and like great grassy hills in the sunshine, quiets even an irritated egoism, and makes it rather ashamed of itself. 'Well, how are you?' he said, showing a hand not quite fit to be grasped. 'Sorry I missed you before. Is there anything particular? You look vexed.'

Sir James's brow had a little crease in it, a little depression of the eyebrow, which he seemed purposely to exaggerate as he answered.

'It is only this conduct of Brooke's. I really think somebody should speak to him.'

'What? meaning to stand?' said Mr Cadwallader, going on with the arrangement of the reels which he had just been turning. 'I hardly think he means it. But where's the harm, if he likes it? Any one who objects to Whiggery should be glad when the Whigs don't put up the strongest fellow. They won't overturn the Constitution with our friend Brooke's head for a battering ram.'

'Oh, I don't mean that,' said Sir James, who, after putting down his hat and throwing himself into a chair, had begun to nurse his leg and examine the sole of his boot with much bitterness. 'I mean this marriage. I mean his letting that blooming young girl marry Casaubon.'

'What is the matter with Casaubon? I see no harm in him - if the girl likes him.'

'She is too young to know what she likes. Her guardian ought to interfere. He ought not to allow the thing to be done in this headlong manner. I wonder a man like you, Cadwallader - a man with daughters, can look at the affair with indifference: and with such a heart as yours! Do think seriously about it.'

'I am not joking; I am as serious as possible,' said the Rector, with a provoking little inward laugh. 'You are as bad as Elinor. She has been wanting me to go and lecture Brooke; and I have reminded her that her friends had a very poor opinion of the match she made when she married me.'

'But look at Casaubon,' said Sir James, indignantly. 'He must be fifty, and I don't believe he could ever have been much more than the shadow of a man. Look at his legs!'

'Confound you handsome young fellows! you think of having it all your own way in the world. You don't understand women. They don't admire you half so much as you admire yourselves. Elinor used to tell her sisters that she married me for my ugliness - it was so various and amusing that it had quite conquered her prudence.'

'You! it was easy enough for a woman to love you. But this is no question of beauty. I don't *like* Casaubon.' This was Sir James's strongest way of implying that he thought ill of a man's character.

'Why? what do you know against him?' said the Rector laying down his reels, and putting his thumbs into his armholes with an air of attention.

Sir James paused. He did not usually find it easy to give his reasons: it seemed to him strange that people should not know them without being told, since he only felt what was reasonable. At last he said -

'Now, Cadwallader, has he got any heart?'

'Well, yes. I don't mean of the melting sort, but a sound kernel, *that* you may be sure of. He is very good to his poor relations: pensions several of the women, and is educating a young fellow at a good deal of expense. Casaubon acts up to his sense of justice. His mother's sister made a bad match - a Pole, I think - lost herself - at any rate was disowned by her family. If it had not been for that, Casaubon would not have had so much money by half. I believe he went himself to find out his cousins, and see what he could do for them. Every man would not ring so well as that, if you tried his metal. *You* would, Chettam; but not every man.'

'I don't know,' said Sir James, coloring. 'I am not so sure of myself.' He paused a moment, and then added, 'That was a right thing for Casaubon to do. But a man may wish to do what is right, and yet be a sort of parchment code. A woman may not be happy with him. And I think when a girl is so young as Miss Brooke is, her friends ought to interfere a little to hinder her from doing anything foolish. You laugh, because you fancy I have some feeling on my own account. But upon my honor, it is not that. I should feel just the same if I were Miss Brooke's brother or uncle.'

'Well, but what should you do?'

'I should say that the marriage must not be decided on until she was of age. And depend upon it, in that case, it would never come off. I wish you saw it as I do - I wish you would talk to Brooke about it.'

Sir James rose as he was finishing his sentence, for he saw Mrs Cadwallader entering from the study. She held by the hand her youngest girl, about five years old, who immediately ran to papa, and was made comfortable on his knee.

'I hear what you are talking about,' said the wife. 'But you will make no impression on Humphrey. As long as the fish rise to his bait, everybody is what he ought to be. Bless you, Casaubon has got a trout-stream, and does not care about fishing in it himself: could there be a better fellow?'

'Well, there is something in that,' said the Rector, with his quiet, inward laugh. 'It is a very good quality in a man to have a trout-stream.'

'But seriously,' said Sir James, whose vexation had not yet spent itself, 'don't you think the Rector might do some good by speaking?'

'Oh, I told you beforehand what he would say,' answered Mrs Cadwallader, lifting up her eyebrows. 'I have done what I could: I wash my hands of the marriage.'

'In the first place,' said the Rector, looking rather grave, 'it would be nonsensical to expect that I could convince Brooke, and make him act accordingly. Brooke is a very good fellow, but pulpy; he will run into any mould, but he won't keep shape.'

'He might keep shape long enough to defer the marriage,' said Sir James.

'But, my dear Chettam, why should I use my influence to Casaubon's disadvantage, unless I were much surer than I am that I should be acting for the advantage of Miss Brooke? I know no harm of Casaubon. I don't care about his Xisuthrus and Fee-fo-fum and the rest; but then he doesn't care about my fishing-tackle. As to the line he took on the Catholic Question, that was unexpected; but he has always been civil to me, and I don't see why I should spoil his sport. For anything I can tell, Miss Brooke may be happier with him than she would be with any other man.'

'Humphrey! I have no patience with you. You know you would rather dine under the hedge than with Casaubon alone. You have nothing to say to each other.'

'What has that to do with Miss Brooke's marrying him? She does not do it for my amusement.'

'He has got no good red blood in his body,' said Sir James.

'No. Somebody put a drop under a magnifying-glass and it was all semicolons and parentheses,' said Mrs Cadwallader.

'Why does he not bring out his book, instead of marrying,' said Sir James, with a disgust which he held warranted by the sound feeling of an English layman.

'Oh, he dreams footnotes, and they run away with all his brains. They say, when he was a little boy, he made an abstract of 'Hop o' my Thumb,' and he has been making abstracts ever since. Ugh! And that is the man Humphrey goes on saying that a woman may be happy with.'

'Well, he is what Miss Brooke likes,' said the Rector. 'I don't profess to understand every young lady's taste.'

'But if she were your own daughter?' said Sir James.

'That would be a different affair. She is *not* my daughter, and I don't feel called upon to interfere. Casaubon is as good as most of us. He is a scholarly clergyman, and creditable to the cloth. Some Radical fellow speechifying at Middlemarch said Casaubon was the learned straw-chopping incumbent, and Freke was the brick-and-mortar incumbent, and I was the angling incumbent. And upon my word, I don't see that one is worse or better than the other.' The Rector ended with his silent laugh. He always saw the joke of any satire against himself. His conscience was large and easy, like the rest of him: it did only what it could do without any trouble.

Clearly, there would be no interference with Miss Brooke's marriage through Mr Cadwallader; and Sir James felt with some sadness that she was to have perfect liberty of misjudgment. It was a sign of his good disposition that he did not slacken at all in his intention of carrying out Dorothea's design of the cottages. Doubtless this persistence was the best course for his own dignity: but pride only helps us to be generous; it never makes us so, any more than vanity makes us witty. She was now enough aware of Sir James's position with regard to her, to appreciate the rectitude of his perseverance in a landlord's duty, to which he had at first been urged by a lover's complaisance, and her pleasure in it was great enough to count for something even in her present happiness. Perhaps she gave to Sir James Chettam's cottages all the interest she could spare from Mr Casaubon, or rather from the symphony of hopeful dreams, admiring trust, and passionate self devotion which that learned gentleman had set playing in her soul. Hence it happened that in the good baronet's succeeding visits, while he was beginning to pay small attentions to Celia, he found himself talking with more and more pleasure to Dorothea. She was perfectly unconstrained and without irritation towards him now, and he was gradually discovering the delight there is in frank kindness and companionship between a man and a woman who have no passion to hide or confess.