

## Chapter XI

'But deeds and language such as men do use, And persons such as comedy would choose, When she would show an image of the times, And sport with human follies, not with crimes.' - BEN JONSON.

Lydgate, in fact, was already conscious of being fascinated by a woman strikingly different from Miss Brooke: he did not in the least suppose that he had lost his balance and fallen in love, but he had said of that particular woman, 'She is grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. That is what a woman ought to be: she ought to produce the effect of exquisite music.' Plain women he regarded as he did the other severe facts of life, to be faced with philosophy and investigated by science. But Rosamond Vincy seemed to have the true melodic charm; and when a man has seen the woman whom he would have chosen if he had intended to marry speedily, his remaining a bachelor will usually depend on her resolution rather than on his. Lydgate believed that he should not marry for several years: not marry until he had trodden out a good clear path for himself away from the broad road which was quite ready made. He had seen Miss Vincy above his horizon almost as long as it had taken Mr Casaubon to become engaged and married: but this learned gentleman was possessed of a fortune; he had assembled his voluminous notes, and had made that sort of reputation which precedes performance, - often the larger part of a man's fame. He took a wife, as we have seen, to adorn the remaining quadrant of his course, and be a little moon that would cause hardly a calculable perturbation. But Lydgate was young, poor, ambitious. He had his half-century before him instead of behind him, and he had come to Middlemarch bent on doing many things that were not directly fitted to make his fortune or even secure him a good income. To a man under such circumstances, taking a wife is something more than a question of adornment, however highly he may rate this; and Lydgate was disposed to give it the first place among wifely functions. To his taste, guided by a single conversation, here was the point on which Miss Brooke would be found wanting, notwithstanding her undeniable beauty. She did not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven.

Certainly nothing at present could seem much less important to Lydgate than the turn of Miss Brooke's mind, or to Miss Brooke than the qualities of the woman who had attracted this young surgeon. But any one watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another, which tells like a calculated irony on the indifference or the frozen stare with which

we look at our un-introduced neighbor. Destiny stands by sarcastic with our *dramatis personae* folded in her hand.

Old provincial society had its share of this subtle movement: had not only its striking downfalls, its brilliant young professional dandies who ended by living up an entry with a drab and six children for their establishment, but also those less marked vicissitudes which are constantly shifting the boundaries of social intercourse, and begetting new consciousness of interdependence. Some slipped a little downward, some got higher footing: people denied aspirates, gained wealth, and fastidious gentlemen stood for boroughs; some were caught in political currents, some in ecclesiastical, and perhaps found themselves surprisingly grouped in consequence; while a few personages or families that stood with rocky firmness amid all this fluctuation, were slowly presenting new aspects in spite of solidity, and altering with the double change of self and beholder. Municipal town and rural parish gradually made fresh threads of connection - gradually, as the old stocking gave way to the savings-bank, and the worship of the solar guinea became extinct; while squires and baronets, and even lords who had once lived blamelessly afar from the civic mind, gathered the faultiness of closer acquaintanceship. Settlers, too, came from distant counties, some with an alarming novelty of skill, others with an offensive advantage in cunning. In fact, much the same sort of movement and mixture went on in old England as we find in older Herodotus, who also, in telling what had been, thought it well to take a woman's lot for his starting-point; though Io, as a maiden apparently beguiled by attractive merchandise, was the reverse of Miss Brooke, and in this respect perhaps bore more resemblance to Rosamond Vincy, who had excellent taste in costume, with that nymph-like figure and pure blindness which give the largest range to choice in the flow and color of drapery. But these things made only part of her charm. She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs Lemon's school, the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female - even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage. Mrs Lemon herself had always held up Miss Vincy as an example: no pupil, she said, exceeded that young lady for mental acquisition and propriety of speech, while her musical execution was quite exceptional. We cannot help the way in which people speak of us, and probably if Mrs Lemon had undertaken to describe Juliet or Imogen, these heroines would not have seemed poetical. The first vision of Rosamond would have been enough with most judges to dispel any prejudice excited by Mrs Lemon's praise.

Lydgate could not be long in Middlemarch without having that agreeable vision, or even without making the acquaintance of the Vincy family; for though Mr Peacock, whose practice he had paid something to enter on, had not been their doctor (Mrs Vincy not liking

the lowering system adopted by him), he had many patients among their connections and acquaintances. For who of any consequence in Middlemarch was not connected or at least acquainted with the Vincys? They were old manufacturers, and had kept a good house for three generations, in which there had naturally been much intermarrying with neighbors more or less decidedly genteel. Mr Vincy's sister had made a wealthy match in accepting Mr Bulstrode, who, however, as a man not born in the town, and altogether of dimly known origin, was considered to have done well in uniting himself with a real Middlemarch family; on the other hand, Mr Vincy had descended a little, having taken an innkeeper's daughter. But on this side too there was a cheering sense of money; for Mrs Vincy's sister had been second wife to rich old Mr Featherstone, and had died childless years ago, so that her nephews and nieces might be supposed to touch the affections of the widower. And it happened that Mr Bulstrode and Mr Featherstone, two of Peacock's most important patients, had, from different causes, given an especially good reception to his successor, who had raised some partisanship as well as discussion. Mr Wrench, medical attendant to the Vincy family, very early had grounds for thinking lightly of Lydgate's professional discretion, and there was no report about him which was not retailed at the Vincys', where visitors were frequent. Mr Vincy was more inclined to general good-fellowship than to taking sides, but there was no need for him to be hasty in making any new man acquaintance. Rosamond silently wished that her father would invite Mr Lydgate. She was tired of the faces and figures she had always been used to - the various irregular profiles and gaits and turns of phrase distinguishing those Middlemarch young men whom she had known as boys. She had been at school with girls of higher position, whose brothers, she felt sure, it would have been possible for her to be more interested in, than in these inevitable Middlemarch companions. But she would not have chosen to mention her wish to her father; and he, for his part, was in no hurry on the subject. An alderman about to be mayor must by-and-by enlarge his dinner-parties, but at present there were plenty of guests at his well-spread table.

That table often remained covered with the relics of the family breakfast long after Mr Vincy had gone with his second son to the warehouse, and when Miss Morgan was already far on in morning lessons with the younger girls in the schoolroom. It awaited the family laggard, who found any sort of inconvenience (to others) less disagreeable than getting up when he was called. This was the case one morning of the October in which we have lately seen Mr Casaubon visiting the Grange; and though the room was a little overheated with the fire, which had sent the spaniel panting to a remote corner, Rosamond, for some reason, continued to sit at her embroidery longer than usual, now and then giving herself a little shake, and laying her work on her knee to contemplate it with an air of hesitating weariness.

Her mamma, who had returned from an excursion to the kitchen, sat on the other side of the small work-table with an air of more entire placidity, until, the clock again giving notice that it was going to strike, she looked up from the lace-mending which was occupying her plump fingers and rang the bell.

‘Knock at Mr Fred's door again, Pritchard, and tell him it has struck half-past ten.’

This was said without any change in the radiant good-humor of Mrs Vincy's face, in which forty-five years had delved neither angles nor parallels; and pushing back her pink capstrings, she let her work rest on her lap, while she looked admiringly at her daughter.

‘Mamma,’ said Rosamond, ‘when Fred comes down I wish you would not let him have red herrings. I cannot bear the smell of them all over the house at this hour of the morning.’

‘Oh, my dear, you are so hard on your brothers! It is the only fault I have to find with you. You are the sweetest temper in the world, but you are so tetchy with your brothers.’

‘Not tetchy, mamma: you never hear me speak in an unladylike way.’

‘Well, but you want to deny them things.’

‘Brothers are so unpleasant.’

‘Oh, my dear, you must allow for young men. Be thankful if they have good hearts. A woman must learn to put up with little things. You will be married some day.’

‘Not to any one who is like Fred.’

‘Don't decry your own brother, my dear. Few young men have less against them, although he couldn't take his degree - I'm sure I can't understand why, for he seems to me most clever. And you know yourself he was thought equal to the best society at college. So particular as you are, my dear, I wonder you are not glad to have such a gentlemanly young man for a brother. You are always finding fault with Bob because he is not Fred.’

‘Oh no, mamma, only because he is Bob.’

‘Well, my dear, you will not find any Middlemarch young man who has not something against him.’

'But' - here Rosamond's face broke into a smile which suddenly revealed two dimples. She herself thought unfavorably of these dimples and smiled little in general society. 'But I shall not marry any Middlemarch young man.'

'So it seems, my love, for you have as good as refused the pick of them; and if there's better to be had, I'm sure there's no girl better deserves it.'

'Excuse me, mamma - I wish you would not say, `the pick of them.'"

'Why, what else are they?'

'I mean, mamma, it is rather a vulgar expression.'

'Very likely, my dear; I never was a good speaker. What should I say?'

'The best of them.'

'Why, that seems just as plain and common. If I had had time to think, I should have said, `the most superior young men.' But with your education you must know.'

'What must Rosy know, mother?' said Mr Fred, who had slid in unobserved through the half-open door while the ladies were bending over their work, and now going up to the fire stood with his back towards it, warming the soles of his slippers.

'Whether it's right to say `superior young men,'" said Mrs Vincy, ringing the bell.

'Oh, there are so many superior teas and sugars now. Superior is getting to be shopkeepers' slang.'

'Are you beginning to dislike slang, then?' said Rosamond, with mild gravity.

'Only the wrong sort. All choice of words is slang. It marks a class.'

'There is correct English: that is not slang.'

'I beg your pardon: correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays. And the strongest slang of all is the slang of poets.'

'You will say anything, Fred, to gain your point.'

'Well, tell me whether it is slang or poetry to call an ox a leg-plaiter.'

'Of course you can call it poetry if you like.'

'Aha, Miss Rosy, you don't know Homer from slang. I shall invent a new game; I shall write bits of slang and poetry on slips, and give them to you to separate.'

'Dear me, how amusing it is to hear young people talk!' said Mrs Vincy, with cheerful admiration.

'Have you got nothing else for my breakfast, Pritchard?' said Fred, to the servant who brought in coffee and buttered toast; while he walked round the table surveying the ham, potted beef, and other cold remnants, with an air of silent rejection, and polite forbearance from signs of disgust.

'Should you like eggs, sir?'

'Eggs, no! Bring me a grilled bone.'

'Really, Fred,' said Rosamond, when the servant had left the room, 'if you must have hot things for breakfast, I wish you would come down earlier. You can get up at six o'clock to go out hunting; I cannot understand why you find it so difficult to get up on other mornings.'

'That is your want of understanding, Rosy. I can get up to go hunting because I like it.'

'What would you think of me if I came down two hours after every one else and ordered grilled bone?'

'I should think you were an uncommonly fast young lady,' said Fred, eating his toast with the utmost composure.

'I cannot see why brothers are to make themselves disagreeable, any more than sisters.'

'I don't make myself disagreeable; it is you who find me so. Disagreeable is a word that describes your feelings and not my actions.'

'I think it describes the smell of grilled bone.'

'Not at all. It describes a sensation in your little nose associated with certain finicking notions which are the classics of Mrs Lemon's school. Look at my mother you don't see her objecting to everything except what she does herself. She is my notion of a pleasant woman.'

'Bless you both, my dears, and don't quarrel,' said Mrs Vincy, with motherly cordiality. 'Come, Fred, tell us all about the new doctor. How is your uncle pleased with him?'

'Pretty well, I think. He asks Lydgate all sorts of questions and then screws up his face while he hears the answers, as if they were pinching his toes. That's his way. Ah, here comes my grilled bone.'

'But how came you to stay out so late, my dear? You only said you were going to your uncle's.'

'Oh, I dined at Plymdale's. We had whist. Lydgate was there too.'

'And what do you think of him? He is very gentlemanly, I suppose. They say he is of excellent family - his relations quite county people.'

'Yes,' said Fred. 'There was a Lydgate at John's who spent no end of money. I find this man is a second cousin of his. But rich men may have very poor devils for second cousins.'

'It always makes a difference, though, to be of good family,' said Rosamond, with a tone of decision which showed that she had thought on this subject. Rosamond felt that she might have been happier if she had not been the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer. She disliked anything which reminded her that her mother's father had been an innkeeper. Certainly any one remembering the fact might think that Mrs Vincy had the air of a very handsome good-humored landlady, accustomed to the most capricious orders of gentlemen.

'I thought it was odd his name was Tertius,' said the bright-faced matron, 'but of course it's a name in the family. But now, tell us exactly what sort of man he is.'

'Oh, tallish, dark, clever - talks well - rather a prig, I think.'

'I never can make out what you mean by a prig,' said Rosamond.

'A fellow who wants to show that he has opinions.'

'Why, my dear, doctors must have opinions,' said Mrs Vincy. 'What are they there for else?'

'Yes, mother, the opinions they are paid for. But a prig is a fellow who is always making you a present of his opinions.'

'I suppose Mary Garth admires Mr Lydgate,' said Rosamond, not without a touch of innuendo.

'Really, I can't say.' said Fred, rather glumly, as he left the table, and taking up a novel which he had brought down with him, threw himself into an arm-chair. 'If you are jealous of her, go oftener to Stone Court yourself and eclipse her.'

'I wish you would not be so vulgar, Fred. If you have finished, pray ring the bell.'

'It is true, though - what your brother says, Rosamond,' Mrs Vincy began, when the servant had cleared the table. 'It is a thousand pities you haven't patience to go and see your uncle more, so proud of you as he is, and wanted you to live with him. There's no knowing what he might have done for you as well as for Fred. God knows, I'm fond of having you at home with me, but I can part with my children for their good. And now it stands to reason that your uncle Featherstone will do something for Mary Garth.'

'Mary Garth can bear being at Stone Court, because she likes that better than being a governess,' said Rosamond, folding up her work. 'I would rather not have anything left to me if I must earn it by enduring much of my uncle's cough and his ugly relations.'

'He can't be long for this world, my dear; I wouldn't hasten his end, but what with asthma and that inward complaint, let us hope there is something better for him in another. And I have no ill-will toward's Mary Garth, but there's justice to be thought of. And Mr Featherstone's first wife brought him no money, as my sister did. Her nieces and nephews can't have so much claim as my sister's. And I must say I think Mary Garth a dreadful plain girl - more fit for a governess.'

'Every one would not agree with you there, mother,' said Fred, who seemed to be able to read and listen too. 'Well, my dear,' said Mrs Vincy, wheeling skilfully, 'if she *had* some fortune left her, - a man marries his wife's relations, and the Garths are so poor, and live in such a small way. But I shall leave you to your studies, my dear; for I must go and do some shopping.'

'Fred's studies are not very deep,' said Rosamond, rising with her mamma, 'he is only reading a novel.'

'Well, well, by-and-by he'll go to his Latin and things,' said Mrs Vincy, soothingly, stroking her son's head. 'There's a fire in the smoking-room on purpose. It's your father's wish, you know - Fred, my dear - and I always tell him you will be good, and go to college again to take your degree.'

Fred drew his mother's hand down to his lips, but said nothing.



'I suppose you are not going out riding to-day?' said Rosamond, lingering a little after her mamma was gone.

'No; why?'

'Papa says I may have the chestnut to ride now.'

'You can go with me to-morrow, if you like. Only I am going to Stone Court, remember.'

'I want to ride so much, it is indifferent to me where we go.' Rosamond really wished to go to Stone Court, of all other places.

'Oh, I say, Rosy,' said Fred, as she was passing out of the room, 'if you are going to the piano, let me come and play some airs with you.'

'Pray do not ask me this morning.'

'Why not this morning?'

'Really, Fred, I wish you would leave off playing the flute. A man looks very silly playing the flute. And you play so out of tune.'

'When next any one makes love to you, Miss Rosamond, I will tell him how obliging you are.'

'Why should you expect me to oblige you by hearing you play the flute, any more than I should expect you to oblige me by not playing it?'

'And why should you expect me to take you out riding?'

This question led to an adjustment, for Rosamond had set her mind on that particular ride.

So Fred was gratified with nearly an hour's practice of 'Ar hyd y nos,' 'Ye banks and braes,' and other favorite airs from his 'Instructor on the Flute;' a wheezy performance, into which he threw much ambition and an irrepressible hopefulness.