Chapter XXII

'Nous causames longtemps; elle etait simple et bonne. Ne sachant pas le mal, elle faisait le bien; Des richesses du coeur elle me fit l'aumone, Et tout en ecoutant comme le coeur se donne, Sans oser y penser je lui donnai le mien; Elle emporta ma vie, et n'en sut jamais rien.' - ALFRED DE MUSSET.

Will Ladislaw was delightfully agreeable at dinner the next day, and gave no opportunity for Mr Casaubon to show disapprobation. On the contrary it seemed to Dorothea that Will had a happier way of drawing her husband into conversation and of deferentially listening to him than she had ever observed in any one before. To be sure, the listeners about Tipton were not highly gifted! Will talked a good deal himself, but what he said was thrown in with such rapidity, and with such an unimportant air of saying something by the way, that it seemed a gay little chime after the great bell. If Will was not always perfect, this was certainly one of his good days. He described touches of incident among the poor people in Rome, only to be seen by one who could move about freely; he found himself in agreement with Mr Casaubon as to the unsound opinions of Middleton concerning the relations of Judaism and Catholicism; and passed easily to a halfenthusiastic half-playful picture of the enjoyment he got out of the very miscellaneousness of Rome, which made the mind flexible with constant comparison, and saved you from seeing the world's ages as a set of box-like partitions without vital connection. Mr Casaubon's studies, Will observed, had always been of too broad a kind for that, and he had perhaps never felt any such sudden effect, but for himself he confessed that Rome had given him quite a new sense of history as a whole: the fragments stimulated his imagination and made him constructive. Then occasionally, but not too often, he appealed to Dorothea, and discussed what she said, as if her sentiment were an item to be considered in the final judgment even of the Madonna di Foligno or the Laocoon. A sense of contributing to form the world's opinion makes conversation particularly cheerful; and Mr Casaubon too was not without his pride in his young wife, who spoke better than most women, as indeed he had perceived in choosing her.

Since things were going on so pleasantly, Mr Casaubon's statement that his labors in the Library would be suspended for a couple of days, and that after a brief renewal he should have no further reason for staying in Rome, encouraged Will to urge that Mrs Casaubon should not go away without seeing a studio or two. Would not Mr Casaubon take her? That sort of thing ought not to be missed: it was quite special: it was a form of life that grew like a small fresh vegetation with its population of insects on huge fossils. Will would be happy to conduct them - not to anything wearisome, only to a few examples.

Mr Casaubon, seeing Dorothea look earnestly towards him, could not but ask her if she would be interested in such visits: he was now at her service during the whole day; and it was agreed that Will should come on the morrow and drive with them.

Will could not omit Thorwaldsen, a living celebrity about whom even Mr Casaubon inquired, but before the day was far advanced he led the way to the studio of his friend Adolf Naumann, whom he mentioned as one of the chief renovators of Christian art, one of those who had not only revived but expanded that grand conception of supreme events as mysteries at which the successive ages were spectators, and in relation to which the great souls of all periods became as it were contemporaries. Will added that he had made himself Naumann's pupil for the nonce.

I have been making some oil-sketches under him,' said Will. I hate copying. I must put something of my own in. Naumann has been painting the Saints drawing the Car of the Church, and I have been making a sketch of Marlowe's Tamburlaine Driving the Conquered Kings in his Chariot. I am not so ecclesiastical as Naumann, and I sometimes twit him with his excess of meaning. But this time I mean to outdo him in breadth of intention. I take Tamburlaine in his chariot for the tremendous course of the world's physical history lashing on the harnessed dynasties. In my opinion, that is a good mythical interpretation.' Will here looked at Mr Casaubon, who received this offhand treatment of symbolism very uneasily, and bowed with a neutral air.

The sketch must be very grand, if it conveys so much,' said Dorothea. I should need some explanation even of the meaning you give. Do you intend Tamburlaine to represent earthquakes and volcanoes?'

'Oh yes,' said Will, laughing, 'and migrations of races and clearings of forests - and America and the steam-engine. Everything you can imagine!'

What a difficult kind of shorthand!' said Dorothea, smiling towards her husband. 'It would require all your knowledge to be able to read it.'

Mr Casaubon blinked furtively at Will. He had a suspicion that he was being laughed at. But it was not possible to include Dorothea in the suspicion.

They found Naumann painting industriously, but no model was present; his pictures were advantageously arranged, and his own plain vivacious person set off by a dove-colored blouse and a maroon velvet cap, so that everything was as fortunate as if he had expected the beautiful young English lady exactly at that time.

The painter in his confident English gave little dissertations on his finished and unfinished subjects, seeming to observe Mr Casaubon as much as he did Dorothea. Will burst in here and there with ardent words of praise, marking out particular merits in his friend's work; and Dorothea felt that she was getting quite new notions as to the significance of Madonnas seated under inexplicable canopied thrones with the simple country as a background, and of saints with architectural models in their hands, or knives accidentally wedged in their skulls. Some things which had seemed monstrous to her were gathering intelligibility and even a natural meaning: but all this was apparently a branch of knowledge in which Mr Casaubon had not interested himself.

I think I would rather feel that painting is beautiful than have to read it as an enigma; but I should learn to understand these pictures sooner than yours with the very wide meaning,' said Dorothea, speaking to Will.

'Don't speak of my painting before Naumann,' said Will. 'He will tell you, it is all pfuscherei, which is his most opprobrious word!'

'Is that true?' said Dorothea, turning her sincere eyes on Naumann, who made a slight grimace and said -

'Oh, he does not mean it seriously with painting. His walk must be belles-lettres. That is wi-ide.'

Naumann's pronunciation of the vowel seemed to stretch the word satirically. Will did not half like it, but managed to laugh: and Mr Casaubon, while he felt some disgust at the artist's German accent, began to entertain a little respect for his judicious severity.

The respect was not diminished when Naumann, after drawing Will aside for a moment and looking, first at a large canvas, then at Mr Casaubon, came forward again and said -

'My friend Ladislaw thinks you will pardon me, sir, if I say that a sketch of your head would be invaluable to me for the St. Thomas Aquinas in my picture there. It is too much to ask; but I so seldom see just what I want - the idealistic in the real.'

You astonish me greatly, sir,' said Mr Casaubon, his looks improved with a glow of delight; 'but if my poor physiognomy, which I have been accustomed to regard as of the commonest order, can be of any use to you in furnishing some traits for the angelical doctor, I shall feel

honored. That is to say, if the operation will not be a lengthy one; and if Mrs Casaubon will not object to the delay.'

As for Dorothea, nothing could have pleased her more, unless it had been a miraculous voice pronouncing Mr Casaubon the wisest and worthiest among the sons of men. In that case her tottering faith would have become firm again.

Naumann's apparatus was at hand in wonderful completeness, and the sketch went on at once as well as the conversation. Dorothea sat down and subsided into calm silence, feeling happier than she had done for a long while before. Every one about her seemed good, and she said to herself that Rome, if she had only been less ignorant, would have been full of beauty its sadness would have been winged with hope. No nature could be less suspicious than hers: when she was a child she believed in the gratitude of wasps and the honorable susceptibility of sparrows, and was proportionately indignant when their baseness was made manifest.

The adroit artist was asking Mr Casaubon questions about English polities, which brought long answers, and, Will meanwhile had perched himself on some steps in the background overlooking all.

Presently Naumann said - 'Now if I could lay this by for half an hour and take it up again - come and look, Ladislaw - I think it is perfect so far.'

Will vented those adjuring interjections which imply that admiration is too strong for syntax; and Naumann said in a tone of piteous regret -

'Ah - now - if I could but have had more - but you have other engagements - I could not ask it - or even to come again to-morrow.' Oh, let us stay!' said Dorothea. 'We have nothing to do to-day except go about, have we?' she added, looking entreatingly at Mr Casaubon. 'It would be a pity not to make the head as good as possible.'

I am at your service, sir, in the matter,' said Mr Casaubon, with polite condescension. 'Having given up the interior of my head to idleness, it is as well that the exterior should work in this way.'

You are unspeakably good - now I am happy!' said Naumann, and then went on in German to Will, pointing here and there to the sketch as if he were considering that. Putting it aside for a moment, he looked round vaguely, as if seeking some occupation for his visitors, and afterwards turning to Mr Casaubon, said -

'Perhaps the beautiful bride, the gracious lady, would not be unwilling to let me fill up the time by trying to make a slight sketch of her - not, of course, as you see, for that picture - only as a single study.'

Mr Casaubon, bowing, doubted not that Mrs Casaubon would oblige him, and Dorothea said, at once, 'Where shall I put myself?'

Naumann was all apologies in asking her to stand, and allow him to adjust her attitude, to which she submitted without any of the affected airs and laughs frequently thought necessary on such occasions, when the painter said, 'It is as Santa Clara that I want you to stand - leaning so, with your cheek against your hand - so - looking at that stool, please, so!'

Will was divided between the inclination to fall at the Saint's feet and kiss her robe, and the temptation to knock Naumann down while he was adjusting her arm. All this was impudence and desecration, and he repented that he had brought her.

The artist was diligent, and Will recovering himself moved about and occupied Mr Casaubon as ingeniously as he could; but he did not in the end prevent the time from seeming long to that gentleman, as was clear from his expressing a fear that Mrs Casaubon would be tired. Naumann took the hint and said -

'Now, sir, if you can oblige me again; I will release the lady-wife.'

So Mr Casaubon's patience held out further, and when after all it turned out that the head of Saint Thomas Aquinas would be more perfect if another sitting could be had, it was granted for the morrow. On the morrow Santa Clara too was retouched more than once. The result of all was so far from displeasing to Mr Casaubon, that he arranged for the purchase of the picture in which Saint Thomas Aquinas sat among the doctors of the Church in a disputation too abstract to be represented, but listened to with more or less attention by an audience above. The Santa Clara, which was spoken of in the second place, Naumann declared himself to be dissatisfied with - he could not, in conscience, engage to make a worthy picture of it; so about the Santa Clara the arrangement was conditional.

I will not dwell on Naumann's jokes at the expense of Mr Casaubon that evening, or on his dithyrambs about Dorothea's charm, in all which Will joined, but with a difference. No sooner did Naumann mention any detail of Dorothea's beauty, than Will got exasperated at his presumption: there was grossness in his choice of the most ordinary words, and what business had he to talk of her lips? She was not a woman to be spoken of as other women were. Will could not say just what he thought, but he became irritable. And yet, when after

some resistance he had consented to take the Casaubons to his friend's studio, he had been allured by the gratification of his pride in being the person who could grant Naumann such an opportunity of studying her loveliness - or rather her divineness, for the ordinary phrases which might apply to mere bodily prettiness were not applicable to her. (Certainly all Tipton and its neighborhood, as well as Dorothea herself, would have been surprised at her beauty being made so much of. In that part of the world Miss Brooke had been only a 'fine young woman.')

'Oblige me by letting the subject drop, Naumann. Mrs Casaubon is not to be talked of as if she were a model,' said Will. Naumann stared at him.

'Schon! I will talk of my Aquinas. The head is not a bad type, after all. I dare say the great scholastic himself would have been flattered to have his portrait asked for. Nothing like these starchy doctors for vanity! It was as I thought: he cared much less for her portrait than his own.'

'He's a cursed white-blooded pedantic coxcomb,' said Will, with gnashing impetuosity. His obligations to Mr Casaubon were not known to his hearer, but Will himself was thinking of them, and wishing that he could discharge them all by a check.

Naumann gave a shrug and said, 'It is good they go away soon, my dear. They are spoiling your fine temper.'

All Will's hope and contrivance were now concentrated on seeing Dorothea when she was alone. He only wanted her to take more emphatic notice of him; he only wanted to be something more special in her remembrance than he could yet believe himself likely to be. He was rather impatient under that open ardent good-will, reach he saw was her usual state of feeling. The remote worship of a woman throned out of their reach plays a great part in men's lives, but in most cases the worshipper longs for some queenly recognition, some approving sign by which his soul's sovereign may cheer him without descending from her high place. That was precisely what Will wanted. But there were plenty of contradictions in his imaginative demands. It was beautiful to see how Dorothea's eyes turned with wifely anxiety and beseeching to Mr Casaubon: she would have lost some of her halo if she had been without that duteous preoccupation; and yet at the next moment the husband's sandy absorption of such nectar was too intolerable; and Will's longing to say damaging things about him was perhaps not the less tormenting because he felt the strongest reasons for restraining it.

Will had not been invited to dine the next day. Hence he persuaded himself that he was bound to call, and that the only eligible time was the middle of the day, when Mr Casaubon would not be at home.

Dorothea, who had not been made aware that her former reception of Will had displeased her husband, had no hesitation about seeing him, especially as he might be come to pay a farewell visit. When he entered she was looking at some cameos which she had been buying for Celia. She greeted Will as if his visit were quite a matter of course, and said at once, having a cameo bracelet in her hand -

I am so glad you are come. Perhaps you understand all about cameos, and can tell me if these are really good. I wished to have you with us in choosing them, but Mr Casaubon objected: he thought there was not time. He will finish his work to-morrow, and we shall go away in three days. I have been uneasy about these cameos. Pray sit down and look at them.'

I am not particularly knowing, but there can be no great mistake about these little Homeric bits: they are exquisitely neat. And the color is fine: it will just suit you.'

'Oh, they are for my sister, who has quite a different complexion. You saw her with me at Lowick: she is light-haired and very pretty - at least I think so. We were never so long away from each other in our lives before. She is a great pet and never was naughty in her life. I found out before I came away that she wanted me to buy her some cameos, and I should be sorry for them not to be good - after their kind.' Dorothea added the last words with a smile.

You seem not to care about cameos,' said Will, seating himself at some distance from her, and observing her while she closed the cases.

No, frankly, I don't think them a great object in life,' said Dorothea

I fear you are a heretic about art generally. How is that? I should have expected you to be very sensitive to the beautiful everywhere.'

I suppose I am dull about many things,' said Dorothea, simply. I should like to make life beautiful - I mean everybody's life. And then all this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life and make it no better for the world, pains one. It spoils my enjoyment of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out from it.'

I call that the fanaticism of sympathy,' said Will, impetuously. You might say the same of landscape, of poetry, of all refinement. If you carried it out you ought to be miserable in your own goodness, and

turn evil that you might have no advantage over others. The best piety is to enjoy - when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth's character as an agreeable planet. And enjoyment radiates. It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight - in art or in anything else. Would you turn all the youth of the world into a tragic chorus, wailing and moralizing over misery? I suspect that you have some false belief in the virtues of misery, and want to make your life a martyrdom.' Will had gone further than he intended, and checked himself. But Dorothea's thought was not taking just the same direction as his own, and she answered without any special emotion -

'Indeed you mistake me. I am not a sad, melancholy creature. I am never unhappy long together. I am angry and naughty - not like Celia: I have a great outburst, and then all seems glorious again. I cannot help believing in glorious things in a blind sort of way. I should be quite willing to enjoy the art here, but there is so much that I don't know the reason of - so much that seems to me a consecration of ugliness rather than beauty. The painting and sculpture may be wonderful, but the feeling is often low and brutal, and sometimes even ridiculous. Here and there I see what takes me at once as noble - something that I might compare with the Alban Mountains or the sunset from the Pincian Hill; but that makes it the greater pity that there is so little of the best kind among all that mass of things over which men have toiled so.'

'Of course there is always a great deal of poor work: the rarer things want that soil to grow in.'

'Oh dear,' said Dorothea, taking up that thought into the chief current of her anxiety; 'I see it must be very difficult to do anything good. I have often felt since I have been in Rome that most of our lives would look much uglier and more bungling than the pictures, if they could be put on the wall.'

Dorothea parted her lips again as if she were going to say more, but changed her mind and paused.

You are too young - it is an anachronism for you to have such thoughts,' said Will, energetically, with a quick shake of the head habitual to him. You talk as if you had never known any youth. It is monstrous - as if you had had a vision of Hades in your childhood, like the boy in the legend. You have been brought up in some of those horrible notions that choose the sweetest women to devour - like Minotaurs And now you will go and be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick: you will be buried alive. It makes me savage to think of it! I would rather never have seen you than think of you with such a prospect.'

Will again feared that he had gone too far; but the meaning we attach to words depends on our feeling, and his tone of angry regret had so much kindness in it for Dorothea's heart, which had always been giving out ardor and had never been fed with much from the living beings around her, that she felt a new sense of gratitude and answered with a gentle smile -

'It is very good of you to be anxious about me. It is because you did not like Lowick yourself: you had set your heart on another kind of life. But Lowick is my chosen home.'

The last sentence was spoken with an almost solemn cadence, and Will did not know what to say, since it would not be useful for him to embrace her slippers, and tell her that he would die for her: it was clear that she required nothing of the sort; and they were both silent for a moment or two, when Dorothea began again with an air of saying at last what had been in her mind beforehand.

I wanted to ask you again about something you said the other day. Perhaps it was half of it your lively way of speaking: I notice that you like to put things strongly; I myself often exaggerate when I speak hastily.'

What was it?' said Will, observing that she spoke with a timidity quite new in her. I have a hyperbolical tongue: it catches fire as it goes. I dare say I shall have to retract.'

I mean what you said about the necessity of knowing German - I mean, for the subjects that Mr Casaubon is engaged in. I have been thinking about it; and it seems to me that with Mr Casaubon's learning he must have before him the same materials as German scholars - has he not?' Dorothea's timidity was due to an indistinct consciousness that she was in the strange situation of consulting a third person about the adequacy of Mr Casaubon's learning.

Not exactly the same materials,' said Will, thinking that he would be duly reserved. 'He is not an Orientalist, you know. He does not profess to have more than second-hand knowledge there.'

But there are very valuable books about antiquities which were written a long while ago by scholars who knew nothing about these modern things; and they are still used. Why should Mr Casaubon's not be valuable, like theirs?' said Dorothea, with more remonstrant energy. She was impelled to have the argument aloud, which she had been having in her own mind.

That depends on the line of study taken,' said Will, also getting a tone of rejoinder. The subject Mr Casaubon has chosen is as changing as

chemistry: new discoveries are constantly making new points of view. Who wants a system on the basis of the four elements, or a book to refute Paracelsus? Do you not see that it is no use now to be crawling a little way after men of the last century - men like Bryant - and correcting their mistakes? - living in a lumber-room and furbishing up broken-legged theories about Chus and Mizraim?'

How can you bear to speak so lightly?' said Dorothea, with a look between sorrow and anger. 'If it were as you say, what could be sadder than so much ardent labor all in vain? I wonder it does not affect you more painfully, if you really think that a man like Mr Casaubon, of so much goodness, power, and learning, should in any way fail in what has been the labor of his best years.' She was beginning to be shocked that she had got to such a point of supposition, and indignant with Will for having led her to it.

You questioned me about the matter of fact, not of feeling,' said Will. 'But if you wish to punish me for the fact, I submit. I am not in a position to express my feeling toward Mr Casaubon: it would be at best a pensioner's eulogy.'

Pray excuse me,' said Dorothea, coloring deeply. I am aware, as you say, that I am in fault in having introduced the subject. Indeed, I am wrong altogether. Failure after long perseverance is much grander than never to have a striving good enough to be called a failure.'

I quite agree with you,' said Will, determined to change the situation - 'so much so that I have made up my mind not to run that risk of never attaining a failure. Mr Casaubon's generosity has perhaps been dangerous to me, and I mean to renounce the liberty it has given me. I mean to go back to England shortly and work my own way - depend on nobody else than myself.'

That is fine - I respect that feeling,' said Dorothea, with returning kindness. 'But Mr Casaubon, I am sure, has never thought of anything in the matter except what was most for your welfare.'

'She has obstinacy and pride enough to serve instead of love, now she has married him,' said Will to himself. Aloud he said, rising -

'I shall not see you again.'

'Oh, stay till Mr Casaubon comes,' said Dorothea, earnestly. 'I am so glad we met in Rome. I wanted to know you.'?

'And I have made you angry,' said Will. 'I have made you think ill of me.'

'Oh no. My sister tells me I am always angry with people who do not say just what I like. But I hope I am not given to think ill of them. In the end I am usually obliged to think ill of myself. for being so impatient.'

'Still, you don't like me; I have made myself an unpleasant thought to you.'

'Not at all,' said Dorothea, with the most open kindness. 'I like you very much.'

Will was not quite contented, thinking that he would apparently have been of more importance if he had been disliked. He said nothing, but looked dull, not to say sulky.

'And I am quite interested to see what you will do,' Dorothea went on cheerfully. 'I believe devoutly in a natural difference of vocation. If it were not for that belief, I suppose I should be very narrow - there are so many things, besides painting, that I am quite ignorant of. You would hardly believe how little I have taken in of music and literature, which you know so much of. I wonder what your vocation will turn out to be: perhaps you will be a poet?'

That depends. To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely ordered variety on the chords of emotion - a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge. One may have that condition by fits only.'

'But you leave out the poems,' said Dorothea. 'I think they are wanted to complete the poet. I understand what you mean about knowledge passing into feeling, for that seems to be just what I experience. But I am sure I could never produce a poem.'

You *are* a poem - and that is to be the best part of a poet - what makes up the poet's consciousness in his best moods,' said Will, showing such originality as we all share with the morning and the spring-time and other endless renewals.

I am very glad to hear it,' said Dorothea, laughing out her words in a bird-like modulation, and looking at Will with playful gratitude in her eyes. 'What very kind things you say to me!'

I wish I could ever do anything that would be what you call kind - that I could ever be of the slightest service to you I fear I shall never have the opportunity.' Will spoke with fervor.

Oh yes,' said Dorothea, cordially. 'It will come; and I shall remember how well you wish me. I quite hoped that we should be friends when I first saw you - because of your relationship to Mr Casaubon.' There was a certain liquid brightness in her eyes, and Will was conscious that his own were obeying a law of nature and filling too. The allusion to Mr Casaubon would have spoiled all if anything at that moment could have spoiled the subduing power, the sweet dignity, of her noble unsuspicious inexperience.

'And there is one thing even now that you can do,' said Dorothea, rising and walking a little way under the strength of a recurring impulse. 'Promise me that you will not again, to any one, speak of that subject - I mean about Mr Casaubon's writings - I mean in that kind of way. It was I who led to it. It was my fault. But promise me.'

She had returned from her brief pacing and stood opposite Will, looking gravely at him.

'Certainly, I will promise you,' said Will, reddening however. If he never said a cutting word about Mr Casaubon again and left off receiving favors from him, it would clearly be permissible to hate him the more. The poet must know how to hate, says Goethe; and Will was at least ready with that accomplishment. He said that he must go now without waiting for Mr Casaubon, whom he would come to take leave of at the last moment. Dorothea gave him her hand, and they exchanged a simple 'Good-by.'

But going out of the porte cochere he met Mr Casaubon, and that gentleman, expressing the best wishes for his cousin, politely waived the pleasure of any further leave-taking on the morrow, which would be sufficiently crowded with the preparations for departure.

I have something to tell you about our cousin Mr Ladislaw, which I think will heighten your opinion of him,' said Dorothea to her husband in the coarse of the evening. She had mentioned immediately on his entering that Will had just gone away, and would come again, but Mr Casaubon had said, I met him outside, and we made our final adieux, I believe,' saying this with the air and tone by which we imply that any subject, whether private or public, does not interest us enough to wish for a further remark upon it. So Dorothea had waited.

'What is that, my love?' said Mr Casaubon (he always said 'my love' when his manner was the coldest).

'He has made up his mind to leave off wandering at once, and to give up his dependence on your generosity. He means soon to go back to England, and work his own way. I thought you would consider that a good sign,' said Dorothea, with an appealing look into her husband's neutral face.

'Did he mention the precise order of occupation to which he would addict himself?'

'No. But he said that he felt the danger which lay for him in your generosity. Of course he will write to you about it. Do you not think better of him for his resolve?'

'I shall await his communication on the subject,' said Mr Casaubon.

I told him I was sure that the thing you considered in all you did for him was his own welfare. I remembered your goodness in what you said about him when I first saw him at Lowick,' said Dorothea, putting her hand on her husband's.

I had a duty towards him,' said Mr Casaubon, laying his other hand on Dorothea's in conscientious acceptance of her caress, but with a glance which he could not hinder from being uneasy. The young man, I confess, is not otherwise an object of interest to me, nor need we, I think, discuss his future course, which it is not ours to determine beyond the limits which I have sufficiently indicated.' Dorothea did not mention Will again.

BOOK III. WAITING FOR DEATH