

Chapter XXVIII

1st Gent. All times are good to seek your wedded home Bringing a mutual delight.

2d Gent. Why, true. The calendar hath not an evil day For souls made one by love, and even death Were sweetness, if it came like rolling waves While they two clasped each other, and foresaw No life apart.

Mr and Mrs Casaubon, returning from their wedding journey, arrived at Lowick Manor in the middle of January. A light snow was falling as they descended at the door, and in the morning, when Dorothea passed from her dressing-room avenue the blue-green boudoir that we know of, she saw the long avenue of limes lifting their trunks from a white earth, and spreading white branches against the dun and motionless sky. The distant flat shrank in uniform whiteness and low-hanging uniformity of cloud. The very furniture in the room seemed to have shrunk since she saw it before: the slag in the tapestry looked more like a ghost in his ghostly blue-green world; the volumes of polite literature in the bookcase looked more like immovable imitations of books. The bright fire of dry oak-boughs burning on the dogs seemed an incongruous renewal of life and glow - like the figure of Dorothea herself as she entered carrying the red-leather cases containing the cameos for Celia.

She was glowing from her morning toilet as only healthful youth can glow: there was gem-like brightness on her coiled hair and in her hazel eyes; there was warm red life in her lips; her throat had a breathing whiteness above the differing white of the fur which itself seemed to wind about her neck and cling down her blue-gray pelisse with a tenderness gathered from her own, a sentient commingled innocence which kept its loveliness against the crystalline purity of the outdoor snow. As she laid the cameo-cases on the table in the bow-window, she unconsciously kept her hands on them, immediately absorbed in looking out on the still, white enclosure which made her visible world.

Mr Casaubon, who had risen early complaining of palpitation, was in the library giving audience to his curate Mr Tucker. By-and-by Celia would come in her quality of bridesmaid as well as sister, and through the next weeks there would be wedding visits received and given; all in continuance of that transitional life understood to correspond with the excitement of bridal felicity, and keeping up the sense of busy ineffectiveness, as of a dream which the dreamer begins to suspect. The duties of her married life, contemplated as so great beforehand, seemed to be shrinking with the furniture and the white vapor-walled landscape. The clear heights where she expected to walk in full communion had become difficult to see even in her imagination; the

delicious repose of the soul on a complete superior had been shaken into uneasy effort and alarmed with dim presentiment. When would the days begin of that active wifely devotion which was to strengthen her husband's life and exalt her own? Never perhaps, as she had preconceived them; but somehow - still somehow. In this solemnly pledged union of her life, duty would present itself in some new form of inspiration and give a new meaning to wifely love.

Meanwhile there was the snow and the low arch of dun vapor - there was the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman's world, where everything was done for her and none asked for her aid - where the sense of connection with a manifold pregnant existence had to be kept up painfully as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims that would have shaped her energies. - 'What shall I do?' 'Whatever you please, my dear:' that had been her brief history since she had left off learning morning lessons and practising silly rhythms on the hated piano. Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty: it had not even filled her leisure with the ruminant joy of unchecked tenderness. Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colorless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight.

In the first minutes when Dorothea looked out she felt nothing but the dreary oppression; then came a keen remembrance, and turning away from the window she walked round the room. The ideas and hopes which were living in her mind when she first saw this room nearly three months before were present now only as memories: she judged them as we judge transient and departed things. All existence seemed to beat with a lower pulse than her own, and her religious faith was a solitary cry, the struggle out of a nightmare in which every object was withering and shrinking away from her. Each remembered thing in the room was disenchanting, was deadened as an unlit transparency, till her wandering gaze came to the group of miniatures, and there at last she saw something which had gathered new breath and meaning: it was the miniature of Mr Casaubon's aunt Julia, who had made the unfortunate marriage - of Will Ladislaw's grandmother. Dorothea could fancy that it was alive now - the delicate woman's face which yet had a headstrong look, a peculiarity difficult to interpret. Was it only her friends who thought her marriage unfortunate? or did she herself find it out to be a mistake, and taste the salt bitterness of her tears in the merciful silence of the night? What breadths of experience Dorothea seemed to have passed over since she first looked at this miniature! She felt a new companionship with it, as if it had an ear for her and could see how she was looking at it. Here was a woman who had known some difficulty about marriage. Nay, the colors deepened,

the lips and chin seemed to get larger, the hair and eyes seemed to be sending out light, the face was masculine and beamed on her with that full gaze which tells her on whom it falls that she is too interesting for the slightest movement of her eyelid to pass unnoticed and uninterpreted. The vivid presentation came like a pleasant glow to Dorothea: she felt herself smiling, and turning from the miniature sat down and looked up as if she were again talking to a figure in front of her. But the smile disappeared as she went on meditating, and at last she said aloud -

‘Oh, it was cruel to speak so! How sad - how dreadful!’

She rose quickly and went out of the room, hurrying along the corridor, with the irresistible impulse to go and see her husband and inquire if she could do anything for him. Perhaps Mr Tucker was gone and Mr Casaubon was alone in the library. She felt as if all her morning's gloom would vanish if she could see her husband glad because of her presence.

But when she reached the head of the dark oak there was Celia coming up, and below there was Mr Brooke, exchanging welcomes and congratulations with Mr Casaubon.

‘Dodo!’ said Celia, in her quiet staccato; then kissed her sister, whose arms encircled her, and said no more. I think they both cried a little in a furtive manner, while Dorothea ran down-stairs to greet her uncle.

‘I need not ask how you are, my dear,’ said Mr Brooke, after kissing her forehead. ‘Rome has agreed with you, I see - happiness, frescos, the antique - that sort of thing. Well, it's very pleasant to have you back again, and you understand all about art now, eh? But Casaubon is a little pale, I tell him - a little pale, you know. Studying hard in his holidays is carrying it rather too far. I overdid it at one time’ - Mr Brooke still held Dorothea's hand, but had turned his face to Mr Casaubon - ‘about topography, ruins, temples - I thought I had a clew, but I saw it would carry me too far, and nothing might come of it. You may go any length in that sort of thing, and nothing may come of it, you know.’

Dorothea's eyes also were turned up to her husband's face with some anxiety at the idea that those who saw him afresh after absence might be aware of signs which she had not noticed.

‘Nothing to alarm you, my dear,’ said Mr Brooke, observing her expression. ‘A little English beef and mutton will soon make a difference. It was all very well to look pale, sitting for the portrait of Aquinas, you know - we got your letter just in time. But Aquinas, now - he was a little too subtle, wasn't he? Does anybody read Aquinas?’

'He is not indeed an author adapted to superficial minds,' said Mr Casaubon, meeting these timely questions with dignified patience.

'You would like coffee in your own room, uncle?' said Dorothea, coming to the rescue.

'Yes; and you must go to Celia: she has great news to tell you, you know. I leave it all to her.'

The blue-green boudoir looked much more cheerful when Celia was seated there in a pelisse exactly like her sister's, surveying the cameos with a placid satisfaction, while the conversation passed on to other topics.

'Do you think it nice to go to Rome on a wedding journey?' said Celia, with her ready delicate blush which Dorothea was used to on the smallest occasions.

'It would not suit all - not you, dear, for example,' said Dorothea, quietly. No one would ever know what she thought of a wedding journey to Rome.

'Mrs Cadwallader says it is nonsense, people going a long journey when they are married. She says they get tired to death of each other, and can't quarrel comfortably, as they would at home. And Lady Chettam says she went to Bath.' Celia's color changed again and again - seemed

'To come and go with tidings from the heart, As it a running messenger had been.'

It must mean more than Celia's blushing usually did.

'Celia! has something happened?' said Dorothea, in a tone full of sisterly feeling. 'Have you really any great news to tell me?'

'It was because you went away, Dodo. Then there was nobody but me for Sir James to talk to,' said Celia, with a certain roguishness in her eyes.

'I understand. It is as I used to hope and believe,' said Dorothea, taking her sister's face between her hands, and looking at her half anxiously. Celia's marriage seemed more serious than it used to do.

'It was only three days ago,' said Celia. 'And Lady Chettam is very kind.'

'And you are very happy?'

'Yes. We are not going to be married yet. Because every thing is to be got ready. And I don't want to be married so very soon, because I think it is nice to be engaged. And we shall be married all our lives after.'

'I do believe you could not marry better, Kitty. Sir James is a good, honorable man,' said Dorothea, warmly.

'He has gone on with the cottages, Dodo. He will tell you about them when he comes. Shall you be glad to see him?'

'Of course I shall. How can you ask me?'

'Only I was afraid you would be getting so learned,' said Celia, regarding Mr Casaubon's learning as a kind of damp which might in due time saturate a neighboring body.