

Chapter L

‘This Loller here wol precilen us somewhat.’ `Nay by my father's soule! that schal he nat,’ Sayde the Schipman, `here schal he not preche, We schal no gospel glosen here ne teche. We leven all in the gret God,’ quod he. He wolden sowen some diffcultee.’ Canterbury Tales.

Dorothea had been safe at Freshitt Hall nearly a week before she had asked any dangerous questions. Every morning now she sat with Celia in the prettiest of up-stairs sitting-rooms, opening into a small conservatory - Celia all in white and lavender like a bunch of mixed violets, watching the remarkable acts of the baby, which were so dubious to her inexperienced mind that all conversation was interrupted by appeals for their interpretation made to the oracular nurse. Dorothea sat by in her widow's dress, with an expression which rather provoked Celia, as being much too sad; for not only was baby quite well, but really when a husband had been so dull and troublesome while he lived, and besides that had - well, well! Sir James, of course, had told Celia everything, with a strong representation how important it was that Dorothea should not know it sooner than was inevitable.

But Mr Brooke had been right in predicting that Dorothea would not long remain passive where action had been assigned to her; she knew the purport of her husband's will made at the time of their marriage, and her mind, as soon as she was clearly conscious of her position, was silently occupied with what she ought to do as the owner of Lowick Manor with the patronage of the living attached to it.

One morning when her uncle paid his usual visit, though with an unusual alacrity in his manner which he accounted for by saying that it was now pretty certain Parliament would be dissolved forthwith, Dorothea said -

‘Uncle, it is right now that I should consider who is to have the living at Lowick. After Mr Tucker had been provided for, I never heard my husband say that he had any clergyman in his mind as a successor to himself. I think I ought to have the keys now and go to Lowick to examine all my husband's papers. There may be something that would throw light on his wishes.’

‘No hurry, my dear,’ said Mr Brooke, quietly. ‘By-and-by, you know, you can go, if you like. But I cast my eyes over things in the desks and drawers - there was nothing - nothing but deep subjects, you know - besides the will. Everything can be done by-and-by. As to the living, I have had an application for interest already - I should say rather good. Mr Tyke has been strongly recommended to me - I had

something to do with getting him an appointment before. An apostolic man, I believe - the sort of thing that would suit you, my dear.'

'I should like to have fuller knowledge about him, uncle, and judge for myself, if Mr Casaubon has not left any expression of his wishes. He has perhaps made some addition to his will - there may be some instructions for me,' said Dorothea, who had all the while had this conjecture in her mind with relation to her husband's work.

'Nothing about the rectory, my dear - nothing,' said Mr Brooke, rising to go away, and putting out his hand to his nieces: 'nor about his researches, you know. Nothing in the will.'

Dorothea's lip quivered.

'Come, you must not think of these things yet, my dear. By-and-by, you know.'

'I am quite well now, uncle; I wish to exert myself.'

'Well, well, we shall see. But I must run away now - I have no end of work now - it's a crisis - a political crisis, you know. And here is Celia and her little man - you are an aunt, you know, now, and I am a sort of grandfather,' said Mr Brooke, with placid hurry, anxious to get away and tell Chettam that it would not be his (Mr Brooke's) fault if Dorothea insisted on looking into everything.

Dorothea sank back in her chair when her uncle had left the room, and cast her eyes down meditatively on her crossed hands.

'Look, Dodo! look at him! Did you ever see anything like that?' said Celia, in her comfortable staccato.

'What, Kitty?' said Dorothea, lifting her eyes rather absently.

'What? why, his upper lip; see how he is drawing it down, as if he meant to make a face. Isn't it wonderful! He may have his little thoughts. I wish nurse were here. Do look at him.'

A large tear which had been for some time gathering, rolled down Dorothea's cheek as she looked up and tried to smile.

'Don't be sad, Dodo; kiss baby. What are you brooding over so? I am sure you did everything, and a great deal too much. You should be happy now.'

'I wonder if Sir James would drive me to Lowick. I want to look over everything - to see if there were any words written for me.'

'You are not to go till Mr Lydgate says you may go. And he has not said so yet (here you are, nurse; take baby and walk up and down the gallery). Besides, you have got a wrong notion in your head as usual, Dodo - I can see that: it vexes me.'

'Where am I wrong, Kitty?' said Dorothea, quite meekly. She was almost ready now to think Celia wiser than herself, and was really wondering with some fear what her wrong notion was. Celia felt her advantage, and was determined to use it. None of them knew Dodo as well as she did, or knew how to manage her. Since Celia's baby was born, she had had a new sense of her mental solidity and calm wisdom. It seemed clear that where there was a baby, things were right enough, and that error, in general, was a mere lack of that central poising force.

'I can see what you are thinking of as well as can be, Dodo,' said Celia. 'You are wanting to find out if there is anything uncomfortable for you to do now, only because Mr Casaubon wished it. As if you had not been uncomfortable enough before. And he doesn't deserve it, and you will find that out. He has behaved very badly. James is as angry with him as can be. And I had better tell you, to prepare you.'

'Celia,' said Dorothea, entreatingly, 'you distress me. Tell me at once what you mean.' It glanced through her mind that Mr Casaubon had left the property away from her - which would not be so very distressing.

'Why, he has made a codicil to his will, to say the property was all to go away from you if you married - I mean - '

'That is of no consequence,' said Dorothea, breaking in impetuously.

'But if you married Mr Ladislaw, not anybody else,' Celia went on with persevering quietude. 'Of course that is of no consequence in one way - you never *would* marry Mr Ladislaw; but that only makes it worse of Mr Casaubon.'

The blood rushed to Dorothea's face and neck painfully. But Celia was administering what she thought a sobering dose of fact. It was taking up notions that had done Dodo's health so much harm. So she went on in her neutral tone, as if she had been remarking on baby's robes.

'James says so. He says it is abominable, and not like a gentleman. And there never was a better judge than James. It is as if Mr Casaubon wanted to make people believe that you would wish to marry Mr Ladislaw - which is ridiculous. Only James says it was to hinder Mr Ladislaw from wanting to marry you for your money - just as if he ever would think of making you an offer. Mrs Cadwallader said

you might as well marry an Italian with white mice! But I must just go and look at baby,' Celia added, without the least change of tone, throwing a light shawl over her, and tripping away.

Dorothea by this time had turned cold again, and now threw herself back helplessly in her chair. She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form that she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs. Everything was changing its aspect: her husband's conduct, her own duteous feeling towards him, every struggle between them - and yet more, her whole relation to Will Ladislaw. Her world was in a state of convulsive change; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew. One change terrified her as if it had been a sin; it was a violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband, who had had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said and did. Then again she was conscious of another change which also made her tremulous; it was a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw. It had never before entered her mind that he could, under any circumstances, be her lover: conceive the effect of the sudden revelation that another had thought of him in that light - that perhaps he himself had been conscious of such a possibility, - and this with the hurrying, crowding vision of unfitting conditions, and questions not soon to be solved.

It seemed a long while - she did not know how long - before she heard Celia saying, 'That will do, nurse; he will be quiet on my lap now. You can go to lunch, and let Garratt stay in the next room.' 'What I think, Dodo,' Celia went on, observing nothing more than that Dorothea was leaning back in her chair, and likely to be passive, 'is that Mr Casaubon was spiteful. I never did like him, and James never did. I think the corners of his mouth were dreadfully spiteful. And now he has behaved in this way, I am sure religion does not require you to make yourself uncomfortable about him. If he has been taken away, that is a mercy, and you ought to be grateful. We should not grieve, should we, baby?' said Celia confidentially to that unconscious centre and poise of the world, who had the most remarkable fists all complete even to the nails, and hair enough, really, when you took his cap off, to make - you didn't know what: - in short, he was Bouddha in a Western form.

At this crisis Lydgate was announced, and one of the first things he said was, 'I fear you are not so well as you were, Mrs Casaubon; have you been agitated? allow me to feel your pulse.' Dorothea's hand was of a marble coldness.

'She wants to go to Lowick, to look over papers,' said Celia. 'She ought not, ought she?'

Lydgate did not speak for a few moments. Then he said, looking at Dorothea. 'I hardly know. In my opinion Mrs Casaubon should do what would give her the most repose of mind. That repose will not always come from being forbidden to act.'

'Thank you,' said Dorothea, exerting herself, 'I am sure that is wise. There are so many things which I ought to attend to. Why should I sit here idle?' Then, with an effort to recall subjects not connected with her agitation, she added, abruptly, 'You know every one in Middlemarch, I think, Mr Lydgate. I shall ask you to tell me a great deal. I have serious things to do now. I have a living to give away. You know Mr Tyke and all the - ' But Dorothea's effort was too much for her; she broke off and burst into sobs. Lydgate made her drink a dose of sal volatile.

'Let Mrs Casaubon do as she likes,' he said to Sir James, whom he asked to see before quitting the house. 'She wants perfect freedom, I think, more than any other prescription.'

His attendance on Dorothea while her brain was excited, had enabled him to form some true conclusions concerning the trials of her life. He felt sure that she had been suffering from the strain and conflict of self-repression; and that she was likely now to feel herself only in another sort of pinfold than that from which she had been released.

Lydgate's advice was all the easier for Sir James to follow when he found that Celia had already told Dorothea the unpleasant fact about the will. There was no help for it now - no reason for any further delay in the execution of necessary business. And the next day Sir James complied at once with her request that he would drive her to Lowick.

'I have no wish to stay there at present,' said Dorothea; 'I could hardly bear it. I am much happier at Freshitt with Celia. I shall be able to think better about what should be done at Lowick by looking at it from a distance. And I should like to be at the Grange a little while with my uncle, and go about in all the old walks and among the people in the village.' 'Not yet, I think. Your uncle is having political company, and you are better out of the way of such doings,' said Sir James, who at that moment thought of the Grange chiefly as a haunt of young Ladislaw's. But no word passed between him and Dorothea about the objectionable part of the will; indeed, both of them felt that the mention of it between them would be impossible. Sir James was shy, even with men, about disagreeable subjects; and the one thing that Dorothea would have chosen to say, if she had spoken on the matter at all, was forbidden to her at present because it seemed to be a further exposure of her husband's injustice. Yet she did wish that Sir James could know what had passed between her and her husband about Will Ladislaw's moral claim on the property: it would then, she

thought, be apparent to him as it was to her, that her husband's strange indelicate proviso had been chiefly urged by his bitter resistance to that idea of claim, and not merely by personal feelings more difficult to talk about. Also, it must be admitted, Dorothea wished that this could be known for Will's sake, since her friends seemed to think of him as simply an object of Mr Casaubon's charity. Why should he be compared with an Italian carrying white mice? That word quoted from Mrs Cadwallader seemed like a mocking travesty wrought in the dark by an impish finger.

At Lowick Dorothea searched desk and drawer - searched all her husband's places of deposit for private writing, but found no paper addressed especially to her, except that 'Synoptical Tabulation,' which was probably only the beginning of many intended directions for her guidance. In carrying out this bequest of labor to Dorothea, as in all else, Mr Casaubon had been slow and hesitating, oppressed in the plan of transmitting his work, as he had been in executing it, by the sense of moving heavily in a dim and clogging medium: distrust of Dorothea's competence to arrange what he had prepared was subdued only by distrust of any other redactor. But he had come at last to create a trust for himself out of Dorothea's nature: she could do what she resolved to do: and he willingly imagined her toiling under the fetters of a promise to erect a tomb with his name upon it. (Not that Mr Casaubon called the future volumes a tomb; he called them the Key to all Mythologies.) But the months gained on him and left his plans belated: he had only had time to ask for that promise by which he sought to keep his cold grasp on Dorothea's life.

The grasp had slipped away. Bound by a pledge given from the depths of her pity, she would have been capable of undertaking a toil which her judgment whispered was vain for all uses except that consecration of faithfulness which is a supreme use. But now her judgment, instead of being controlled by dutiful devotion, was made active by the imbittering discovery that in her past union there had lurked the hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion. The living, suffering man was no longer before her to awaken her pity: there remained only the retrospect of painful subjection to a husband whose thoughts had been lower than she had believed, whose exorbitant claims for himself had even blinded his scrupulous care for his own character, and made him defeat his own pride by shocking men of ordinary honor. As for the property which was the sign of that broken tie, she would have been glad to be free from it and have nothing more than her original fortune which had been settled on her, if there had not been duties attached to ownership, which she ought not to flinch from. About this property many troublous questions insisted on rising: had she not been right in thinking that the half of it ought to go to Will Ladislaw? - but was it not impossible now for her to do that act of justice? Mr Casaubon had taken a cruelly effective means of hindering her: even

with indignation against him in her heart, any act that seemed a triumphant eluding of his purpose revolted her.

After collecting papers of business which she wished to examine, she locked up again the desks and drawers - all empty of personal words for her - empty of any sign that in her husband's lonely brooding his heart had gone out to her in excuse or explanation; and she went back to Freshitt with the sense that around his last hard demand and his last injurious assertion of his power, the silence was unbroken.

Dorothea tried now to turn her thoughts towards immediate duties, and one of these was of a kind which others were determined to remind her of. Lydgate's ear had caught eagerly her mention of the living, and as soon as he could, he reopened the subject, seeing here a possibility of making amends for the casting-vote he had once given with an ill-satisfied conscience. 'Instead of telling you anything about Mr Tyke,' he said, 'I should like to speak of another man - Mr Farebrother, the Vicar of St. Botolph's. His living is a poor one, and gives him a stinted provision for himself and his family. His mother, aunt, and sister all live with him, and depend upon him. I believe he has never married because of them. I never heard such good preaching as his - such plain, easy eloquence. He would have done to preach at St. Paul's Cross after old Latimer. His talk is just as good about all subjects: original, simple, clear. I think him a remarkable fellow: he ought to have done more than he has done.'

'Why has he not done more?' said Dorothea, interested now in all who had slipped below their own intention.

'That's a hard question,' said Lydgate. 'I find myself that it's uncommonly difficult to make the right thing work: there are so many strings pulling at once. Farebrother often hints that he has got into the wrong profession; he wants a wider range than that of a poor clergyman, and I suppose he has no interest to help him on. He is very fond of Natural History and various scientific matters, and he is hampered in reconciling these tastes with his position. He has no money to spare - hardly enough to use; and that has led him into card-playing - Middlemarch is a great place for whist. He does play for money, and he wins a good deal. Of course that takes him into company a little beneath him, and makes him slack about some things; and yet, with all that, looking at him as a whole, I think he is one of the most blameless men I ever knew. He has neither venom nor doubleness in him, and those often go with a more correct outside.'

'I wonder whether he suffers in his conscience because of that habit,' said Dorothea; 'I wonder whether he wishes he could leave it off.'

'I have no doubt he would leave it off, if he were transplanted into plenty: he would be glad of the time for other things.'

'My uncle says that Mr Tyke is spoken of as an apostolic man,' said Dorothea, meditatively. She was wishing it were possible to restore the times of primitive zeal, and yet thinking of Mr Farebrother with a strong desire to rescue him from his chance-gotten money.

'I don't pretend to say that Farebrother is apostolic,' said Lydgate. 'His position is not quite like that of the Apostles: he is only a parson among parishioners whose lives he has to try and make better. Practically I find that what is called being apostolic now, is an impatience of everything in which the parson doesn't cut the principal figure. I see something of that in Mr Tyke at the Hospital: a good deal of his doctrine is a sort of pinching hard to make people uncomfortably - aware of him. Besides, an apostolic man at Lowick! - he ought to think, as St. Francis did, that it is needful to preach to the birds.'

'True,' said Dorothea. 'It is hard to imagine what sort of notions our farmers and laborers get from their teaching. I have been looking into a volume of sermons by Mr Tyke: such sermons would be of no use at Lowick - I mean, about imputed righteousness and the prophecies in the Apocalypse. I have always been thinking of the different ways in which Christianity is taught, and whenever I find one way that makes it a wider blessing than any other, I cling to that as the truest - I mean that which takes in the most good of all kinds, and brings in the most people as sharers in it. It is surely better to pardon too much, than to condemn too much. But I should like to see Mr Farebrother and hear him preach.'

'Do,' said Lydgate; 'I trust to the effect of that. He is very much beloved, but he has his enemies too: there are always people who can't forgive an able man for differing from them. And that money-winning business is really a blot. You don't, of course, see many Middlemarch people: but Mr Ladislav, who is constantly seeing Mr Brooke, is a great friend of Mr Farebrother's old ladies, and would be glad to sing the Vicar's praises. One of the old ladies - Miss Noble, the aunt - is a wonderfully quaint picture of self-forgetful goodness, and Ladislav gallants her about sometimes. I met them one day in a back street: you know Ladislav's look - a sort of Daphnis in coat and waistcoat; and this little old maid reaching up to his arm - they looked like a couple dropped out of a romantic comedy. But the best evidence about Farebrother is to see him and hear him.'

Happily Dorothea was in her private sitting-room when this conversation occurred, and there was no one present to make Lydgate's innocent introduction of Ladislav painful to her. As was

usual with him in matters of personal gossip, Lydgate had quite forgotten Rosamond's remark that she thought Will adored Mrs Casaubon. At that moment he was only caring for what would recommend the Farebrother family; and he had purposely given emphasis to the worst that could be said about the Vicar, in order to forestall objections. In the weeks since Mr Casaubon's death he had hardly seen Ladislaw, and he had heard no rumor to warn him that Mr Brooke's confidential secretary was a dangerous subject with Mrs Casaubon. When he was gone, his picture of Ladislaw lingered in her mind and disputed the ground with that question of the Lowick living. What was Will Ladislaw thinking about her? Would he hear of that fact which made her cheeks burn as they never used to do? And how would he feel when he heard it? - But she could see as well as possible how he smiled down at the little old maid. An Italian with white mice! - on the contrary, he was a creature who entered into every one's feelings, and could take the pressure of their thought instead of urging his own with iron resistance.