

BOOK VI. THE WIDOW AND THE WIFE

Chapter LIV

'Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore; Per che si fa gentil eio ch'ella mira: Ov'ella passa, ogni uom ver lei si gira, E cui saluta fa tremar lo core.

Sicche, bassando il viso, tutto smore, E d'ogni suo difetto allor sospira: Fuggon dinanzi a lei Superbia ed Ira: Aiutatemi, donne, a farle onore.

Ogni dolcezza, ogni pensiero umile Nasee nel core a chi parlar la sente; Ond' e beato chi prima la vide. Quel ch'ella par quand' un poco sorride, Non si pub dicer, ne tener a mente, Si e nuovo miracolo gentile.' - DANTE: la Vita Nuova.

By that delightful morning when the hay-ricks at Stone Court were scenting the air quite impartially, as if Mr Raffles had been a guest worthy of finest incense, Dorothea had again taken up her abode at Lowick Manor. After three months Freshitt had become rather oppressive: to sit like a model for Saint Catherine looking rapturously at Celia's baby would not do for many hours in the day, and to remain in that momentous babe's presence with persistent disregard was a course that could not have been tolerated in a childless sister. Dorothea would have been capable of carrying baby joyfully for a mile if there had been need, and of loving it the more tenderly for that labor; but to an aunt who does not recognize her infant nephew as Bouddha, and has nothing to do for him but to admire, his behavior is apt to appear monotonous, and the interest of watching him exhaustible. This possibility was quite hidden from Celia, who felt that Dorothea's childless widowhood fell in quite prettily with the birth of little Arthur (baby was named after Mr Brooke).

'Dodo is just the creature not to mind about having anything of her own - children or anything!' said Celia to her husband. 'And if she had had a baby, it never could have been such a dear as Arthur. Could it, James?

'Not if it had been like Casaubon,' said Sir James, conscious of some indirectness in his answer, and of holding a strictly private opinion as to the perfections of his first-born.

'No! just imagine! Really it was a mercy,' said Celia; 'and I think it is very nice for Dodo to be a widow. She can be just as fond of our baby as if it were her own, and she can have as many notions of her own as she likes.'

'It is a pity she was not a queen,' said the devout Sir James.

'But what should we have been then? We must have been something else,' said Celia, objecting to so laborious a flight of imagination. 'I like her better as she is.'

Hence, when she found that Dorothea was making arrangements for her final departure to Lowick, Celia raised her eyebrows with disappointment, and in her quiet unemphatic way shot a needle-arrow of sarcasm.

'What will you do at Lowick, Dodo? You say yourself there is nothing to be done there: everybody is so clean and well off, it makes you quite melancholy. And here you have been so happy going all about Tipton with Mr Garth into the worst backyards. And now uncle is abroad, you and Mr Garth can have it all your own way; and I am sure James does everything you tell him.'

'I shall often come here, and I shall see how baby grows all the better,' said Dorothea.

'But you will never see him washed,' said Celia; 'and that is quite the best part of the day.' She was almost pouting: it did seem to her very hard in Dodo to go away from the baby when she might stay.

'Dear Kitty, I will come and stay all night on purpose,' said Dorothea; 'but I want to be alone now, and in my own home. I wish to know the Farebrothers better, and to talk to Mr Farebrother about what there is to be done in Middlemarch.'

Dorothea's native strength of will was no longer all converted into resolute submission. She had a great yearning to be at Lowick, and was simply determined to go, not feeling bound to tell all her reasons. But every one around her disapproved. Sir James was much pained, and offered that they should all migrate to Cheltenham for a few months with the sacred ark, otherwise called a cradle: at that period a man could hardly know what to propose if Cheltenham were rejected.

The Dowager Lady Chettam, just returned from a visit to her daughter in town, wished, at least, that Mrs Vigo should be written to, and invited to accept the office of companion to Mrs Casaubon: it was not credible that Dorothea as a young widow would think of living alone in the house at Lowick. Mrs Vigo had been reader and secretary to royal personages, and in point of knowledge and sentiments even Dorothea could have nothing to object to her.

Mrs Cadwallader said, privately, 'You will certainly go mad in that house alone, my dear. You will see visions. We have all got to exert

ourselves a little to keep sane, and call things by the same names as other people call them by. To be sure, for younger sons and women who have no money, it is a sort of provision to go mad: they are taken care of then. But you must not run into that. I dare say you are a little bored here with our good dowager; but think what a bore you might become yourself to your fellow-creatures if you were always playing tragedy queen and taking things sublimely. Sitting alone in that library at Lowick you may fancy yourself ruling the weather; you must get a few people round you who wouldn't believe you if you told them. That is a good lowering medicine.'

'I never called everything by the same name that all the people about me did,' said Dorothea, stoutly.

'But I suppose you have found out your mistake, my dear,' said Mrs Cadwallader, 'and that is a proof of sanity.'

Dorothea was aware of the sting, but it did not hurt her. 'No,' she said, 'I still think that the greater part of the world is mistaken about many things. Surely one may be sane and yet think so, since the greater part of the world has often had to come round from its opinion.'

Mrs Cadwallader said no more on that point to Dorothea, but to her husband she remarked, 'It will be well for her to marry again as soon as it is proper, if one could get her among the right people. Of course the Chettams would not wish it. But I see clearly a husband is the best thing to keep her in order. If we were not so poor I would invite Lord Triton. He will be marquis some day, and there is no denying that she would make a good marchioness: she looks handsomer than ever in her mourning.'

'My dear Elinor, do let the poor woman alone. Such contrivances are of no use,' said the easy Rector.

'No use? How are matches made, except by bringing men and women together? And it is a shame that her uncle should have run away and shut up the Grange just now. There ought to be plenty of eligible matches invited to Freshitt and the Grange. Lord Triton is precisely the man: full of plans for making the people happy in a soft-headed sort of way. That would just suit Mrs Casaubon.'

'Let Mrs Casaubon choose for herself, Elinor.'

'That is the nonsense you wise men talk! How can she choose if she has no variety to choose from? A woman's choice usually means taking the only man she can get. Mark my words, Humphrey. If her

friends don't exert themselves, there will be a worse business than the Casaubon business yet.'

'For heaven's sake don't touch on that topic, Elinor! It is a very sore point with Sir James He would be deeply offended if you entered on it to him unnecessarily.'

'I have never entered on it,' said Mrs Cadwallader, opening her hands. 'Celia told me all about the will at the beginning, without any asking of mine.'

'Yes, yes; but they want the thing hushed up, and I understand that the young fellow is going out of the neighborhood.'

Mrs Cadwallader said nothing, but gave her husband three significant nods, with a very sarcastic expression in her dark eyes.

Dorothea quietly persisted in spite of remonstrance and persuasion. So by the end of June the shutters were all opened at Lowick Manor, and the morning gazed calmly into the library, shining on the rows of note-books as it shines on the weary waste planted with huge stones, the mute memorial of a forgotten faith; and the evening laden with roses entered silently into the blue-green boudoir where Dorothea chose oftenest to sit. At first she walked into every room, questioning the eighteen months of her married life, and carrying on her thoughts as if they were a speech to be heard by her husband. Then, she lingered in the library and could not be at rest till she had carefully ranged all the note-books as she imagined that he would wish to see them, in orderly sequence. The pity which had been the restraining compelling motive in her life with him still clung about his image, even while she remonstrated with him in indignant thought and told him that he was unjust. One little act of hers may perhaps be smiled at as superstitious. The Synoptical Tabulation for the use of Mrs Casaubon, she carefully enclosed and sealed, writing within the envelope, 'I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in - Dorothea?' Then she deposited the paper in her own desk.

That silent colloquy was perhaps only the more earnest because underneath and through it all there was always the deep longing which had really determined her to come to Lowick. The longing was to see Will Ladislaw. She did not know any good that could come of their meeting: she was helpless; her hands had been tied from making up to him for any unfairness in his lot. But her soul thirsted to see him. How could it be otherwise? If a princess in the days of enchantment had seen a four-footed creature from among those which live in herds come to her once and again with a human gaze which rested upon her with choice and beseeching, what would she think of

in her journeying, what would she look for when the herds passed her? Surely for the gaze which had found her, and which she would know again. Life would be no better than candle-light tinsel and daylight rubbish if our spirits were not touched by what has been, to issues of longing and constancy. It was true that Dorothea wanted to know the Farebrothers better, and especially to talk to the new rector, but also true that remembering what Lydgate had told her about Will Ladislaw and little Miss Noble, she counted on Will's coming to Lowick to see the Farebrother family. The very first Sunday, *before* she entered the church, she saw him as she had seen him the last time she was there, alone in the clergyman's pew; but *when* she entered his figure was gone.

In the week-days when she went to see the ladies at the Rectory, she listened in vain for some word that they might let fall about Will; but it seemed to her that Mrs Farebrother talked of every one else in the neighborhood and out of it.

'Probably some of Mr Farebrother's Middlemarch hearers may follow him to Lowick sometimes. Do you not think so?' said Dorothea, rather despising herself for having a secret motive in asking the question.

'If they are wise they will, Mrs Casaubon,' said the old lady. 'I see that you set a right value on my son's preaching. His grandfather on my side was an excellent clergyman, but his father was in the law: - most exemplary and honest nevertheless, which is a reason for our never being rich. They say Fortune is a woman and capricious. But sometimes she is a good woman and gives to those who merit, which has been the case with you, Mrs Casaubon, who have given a living to my son.'

Mrs Farebrother recurred to her knitting with a dignified satisfaction in her neat little effort at oratory, but this was not what Dorothea wanted to hear. Poor thing! she did not even know whether Will Ladislaw was still at Middlemarch, and there was no one whom she dared to ask, unless it were Lydgate. But just now she could not see Lydgate without sending for him or going to seek him. Perhaps Will Ladislaw, having heard of that strange ban against him left by Mr Casaubon, had felt it better that he and she should not meet again, and perhaps she was wrong to wish for a meeting that others might find many good reasons against. Still 'I do wish it' came at the end of those wise reflections as naturally as a sob after holding the breath. And the meeting did happen, but in a formal way quite unexpected by her.

One morning, about eleven, Dorothea was seated in her boudoir with a map of the land attached to the manor and other papers before her, which were to help her in making an exact statement for herself of her

income and affairs. She had not yet applied herself to her work, but was seated with her hands folded on her lap, looking out along the avenue of limes to the distant fields. Every leaf was at rest in the sunshine, the familiar scene was changeless, and seemed to represent the prospect of her life, full of motiveless ease - motiveless, if her own energy could not seek out reasons for ardent action. The widow's cap of those times made an oval frame for the face, and had a crown standing up; the dress was an experiment in the utmost laying on of crape; but this heavy solemnity of clothing made her face look all the younger, with its recovered bloom, and the sweet, inquiring candor of her eyes.

Her reverie was broken by Tantripp, who came to say that Mr Ladislaw was below, and begged permission to see Madam if it were not too early.

'I will see him,' said Dorothea, rising immediately. 'Let him be shown into the drawing-room.'

The drawing-room was the most neutral room in the house to her - the one least associated with the trials of her married life: the damask matched the wood-work, which was all white and gold; there were two tall mirrors and tables with nothing on them - in brief, it was a room where you had no reason for sitting in one place rather than in another. It was below the boudoir, and had also a bow-window looking out on the avenue. But when Pratt showed Will Ladislaw into it the window was open; and a winged visitor, buzzing in and out now and then without minding the furniture, made the room look less formal and uninhabited.

'Glad to see you here again, sir,' said Pratt, lingering to adjust a blind.

'I am only come to say good-by, Pratt,' said Will, who wished even the butler to know that he was too proud to hang about Mrs Casaubon now she was a rich widow.

'Very sorry to hear it, sir,' said Pratt, retiring. Of course, as a servant who was to be told nothing, he knew the fact of which Ladislaw was still ignorant, and had drawn his inferences; indeed, had not differed from his betrothed Tantripp when she said, 'Your master was as jealous as a fiend - and no reason. Madam would look higher than Mr Ladislaw, else I don't know her. Mrs Cadwallader's maid says there's a lord coming who is to marry her when the mourning's over.'

There were not many moments for Will to walk about with his hat in his hand before Dorothea entered. The meeting was very different from that first meeting in Rome when Will had been embarrassed and Dorothea calm. This time he felt miserable but determined, while she

was in a state of agitation which could not be hidden. Just outside the door she had felt that this longed-for meeting was after all too difficult, and when she saw Will advancing towards her, the deep blush which was rare in her came with painful suddenness. Neither of them knew how it was, but neither of them spoke. She gave her hand for a moment, and then they went to sit down near the window, she on one settee and he on another opposite. Will was peculiarly uneasy: it seemed to him not like Dorothea that the mere fact of her being a widow should cause such a change in her manner of receiving him; and he knew of no other condition which could have affected their previous relation to each other - except that, as his imagination at once told him, her friends might have been poisoning her mind with their suspicions of him.

'I hope I have not presumed too much in calling,' said Will; 'I could not bear to leave the neighborhood and begin a new life without seeing you to say good-by.'

'Presumed? Surely not. I should have thought it unkind if you had not wished to see me,' said Dorothea, her habit of speaking with perfect genuineness asserting itself through all her uncertainty and agitation. 'Are you going away immediately?'

'Very soon, I think. I intend to go to town and eat my dinners as a barrister, since, they say, that is the preparation for all public business. There will be a great deal of political work to be done by-and-by, and I mean to try and do some of it. Other men have managed to win an honorable position for themselves without family or money.'

'And that will make it all the more honorable,' said Dorothea, ardently. 'Besides, you have so many talents. I have heard from my uncle how well you speak in public, so that every one is sorry when you leave off, and how clearly you can explain things. And you care that justice should be done to every one. I am so glad. When we were in Rome, I thought you only cared for poetry and art, and the things that adorn life for us who are well off. But now I know you think about the rest of the world.'

While she was speaking Dorothea had lost her personal embarrassment, and had become like her former self. She looked at Will with a direct glance, full of delighted confidence.

'You approve of my going away for years, then, and never coming here again till I have made myself of some mark in the world?' said Will, trying hard to reconcile the utmost pride with the utmost effort to get an expression of strong feeling from Dorothea.

She was not aware how long it was before she answered. She had turned her head and was looking out of the window on the rose-bushes, which seemed to have in them the summers of all the years when Will would be away. This was not judicious behavior. But Dorothea never thought of studying her manners: she thought only of bowing to a sad necessity which divided her from Will. Those first words of his about his intentions had seemed to make everything clear to her: he knew, she supposed, all about Mr Casaubon's final conduct in relation to him, and it had come to him with the same sort of shock as to herself. He had never felt more than friendship for her - had never had anything in his mind to justify what she felt to be her husband's outrage on the feelings of both: and that friendship he still felt. Something which may be called an inward silent sob had gone on in Dorothea before she said with a pure voice, just trembling in the last words as if only from its liquid flexibility -

'Yes, it must be right for you to do as you say. I shall be very happy when I hear that you have made your value felt. But you must have patience. It will perhaps be a long while.'

Will never quite knew how it was that he saved himself from falling down at her feet, when the 'long while' came forth with its gentle tremor. He used to say that the horrible hue and surface of her crape dress was most likely the sufficient controlling force. He sat still, however, and only said -

'I shall never hear from you. And you will forget all about me.'

'No,' said Dorothea, 'I shall never forget you. I have never forgotten any one whom I once knew. My life has never been crowded, and seems not likely to be so. And I have a great deal of space for memory at Lowick, haven't I?' She smiled.

'Good God!' Will burst out passionately, rising, with his hat still in his hand, and walking away to a marble table, where he suddenly turned and leaned his back against it. The blood had mounted to his face and neck, and he looked almost angry. It had seemed to him as if they were like two creatures slowly turning to marble in each other's presence, while their hearts were conscious and their eyes were yearning. But there was no help for it. It should never be true of him that in this meeting to which he had come with bitter resolution he had ended by a confession which might be interpreted into asking for her fortune. Moreover, it was actually true that he was fearful of the effect which such confessions might have on Dorothea herself.

She looked at him from that distance in some trouble, imagining that there might have been an offence in her words. But all the while there was a current of thought in her about his probable want of money,

and the impossibility of her helping him. If her uncle had been at home, something might have been done through him! It was this preoccupation with the hardship of Will's wanting money, while she had what ought to have been his share, which led her to say, seeing that he remained silent and looked away from her -

'I wonder whether you would like to have that miniature which hangs up-stairs - I mean that beautiful miniature of your grandmother. I think it is not right for me to keep it, if you would wish to have it. It is wonderfully like you.'

'You are very good,' said Will, irritably. 'No; I don't mind about it. It is not very consoling to have one's own likeness. It would be more consoling if others wanted to have it.'

'I thought you would like to cherish her memory - I thought - 'Dorothea broke off an instant, her imagination suddenly warning her away from Aunt Julia's history - 'you would surely like to have the miniature as a family memorial.'

'Why should I have that, when I have nothing else! A man with only a portmanteau for his stowage must keep his memorials in his head.'

Will spoke at random: he was merely venting his petulance; it was a little too exasperating to have his grandmother's portrait offered him at that moment. But to Dorothea's feeling his words had a peculiar sting. She rose and said with a touch of indignation as well as hauteur -

'You are much the happier of us two, Mr Ladislaw, to have nothing.'

Will was startled. Whatever the words might be, the tone seemed like a dismissal; and quitting his leaning posture, he walked a little way towards her. Their eyes met, but with a strange questioning gravity. Something was keeping their minds aloof, and each was left to conjecture what was in the other. Will had really never thought of himself as having a claim of inheritance on the property which was held by Dorothea, and would have required a narrative to make him understand her present feeling.

'I never felt it a misfortune to have nothing till now,' he said. 'But poverty may be as bad as leprosy, if it divides us from what we most care for.'

The words cut Dorothea to the heart, and made her relent. She answered in a tone of sad fellowship.

'Sorrow comes in so many ways. Two years ago I had no notion of that - I mean of the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands, and makes us silent when we long to speak. I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up,' she ended, smiling playfully.

'I have not given up doing as I like, but I can very seldom do it,' said Will. He was standing two yards from her with his mind full of contradictory desires and resolves - desiring some unmistakable proof that she loved him, and yet dreading the position into which such a proof might bring him. 'The thing one most longs for may be surrounded with conditions that would be intolerable.'

At this moment Pratt entered and said, 'Sir James Chettam is in the library, madam.'

'Ask Sir James to come in here,' said Dorothea, immediately. It was as if the same electric shock had passed through her and Will. Each of them felt proudly resistant, and neither looked at the other, while they awaited Sir James's entrance.

After shaking hands with Dorothea, he bowed as slightly as possible to Ladislaw, who repaid the slightness exactly, and then going towards Dorothea, said -

'I must say good-by, Mrs Casaubon; and probably for a long while.'

Dorothea put out her hand and said her good-by cordially. The sense that Sir James was depreciating Will, and behaving rudely to him, roused her resolution and dignity: there was no touch of confusion in her manner. And when Will had left the room, she looked with such calm self-possession at Sir James, saying, 'How is Celia?' that he was obliged to behave as if nothing had annoyed him. And what would be the use of behaving otherwise? Indeed, Sir James shrank with so much dislike from the association even in thought of Dorothea with Ladislaw as her possible lover, that he would himself have wished to avoid an outward show of displeasure which would have recognized the disagreeable possibility. If any one had asked him why he shrank in that way, I am not sure that he would at first have said anything fuller or more precise than '*That Ladislaw!*' - though on reflection he might have urged that Mr Casaubon's codicil, barring Dorothea's marriage with Will, except under a penalty, was enough to cast unfitness over any relation at all between them. His aversion was all the stronger because he felt himself unable to interfere.

But Sir James was a power in a way unguessed by himself. Entering at that moment, he was an incorporation of the strongest reasons

through which Will's pride became a repellent force, keeping him asunder from Dorothea.