## Chapter LV

Hath she her faults? I would you had them too. They are the fruity must of soundest wine; Or say, they are regenerating fire Such as hath turned the dense black element Into a crystal pathway for the sun.

If youth is the season of hope, it is often so only in the sense that our elders are hopeful about us; for no age is so apt as youth to think its emotions, partings, and resolves are the last of their kind. Each crisis seems final, simply because it is new. We are told that the oldest inhabitants in Peru do not cease to be agitated by the earthquakes, but they probably see beyond each shock, and reflect that there are plenty more to come.

To Dorothea, still in that time of youth when the eyes with their long full lashes look out after their rain of tears unsoiled and unwearied as a freshly opened passion-flower, that morning's parting with Will Ladislaw seemed to be the close of their personal relations. He was going away into the distance of unknown years, and if ever he came back he would be another man. The actual state of his mind - his proud resolve to give the lie beforehand to any suspicion that he would play the needy adventurer seeking a rich woman - lay quite out of her imagination, and she had interpreted all his behavior easily enough by her supposition that Mr Casaubon's codicil seemed to him, as it did to her, a gross and cruel interdict on any active friendship between them. Their young delight in speaking to each other, and saying what no one else would care to hear, was forever ended, and become a treasure of the past. For this very reason she dwelt on it without inward check. That unique happiness too was dead, and in its shadowed silent chamber she might vent the passionate grief which she herself wondered at. For the first time she took down the miniature from the wall and kept it before her, liking to blend the woman who had been too hardly judged with the grandson whom her own heart and judgment defended. Can any one who has rejoiced in woman's tenderness think it a reproach to her that she took the little oval picture in her palm and made a bed for it there, and leaned her cheek upon it, as if that would soothe the creatures who had suffered unjust condemnation? She did not know then that it was Love who had come to her briefly, as in a dream before awaking, with the hues of morning on his wings - that it was Love to whom she was sobbing her farewell as his image was banished by the blameless rigor of irresistible day. She only felt that there was something irrevocably amiss and lost in her lot, and her thoughts about the future were the more readily shapen into resolve. Ardent souls, ready to construct their coming lives, are apt to commit themselves to the fulfilment of their own visions.

One day that she went to Freshitt to fulfil her promise of staying all night and seeing baby washed, Mrs Cadwallader came to dine, the Rector being gone on a fishing excursion. It was a warm evening, and even in the delightful drawing-room, where the fine old turf sloped from the open window towards a lilied pool and well-planted mounds, the heat was enough to make Celia in her white muslin and light curls reflect with pity on what Dodo must feel in her black dress and close cap. But this was not until some episodes with baby were over, and had left her mind at leisure. She had seated herself and taken up a fan for some time before she said, in her quiet guttural -

'Dear Dodo, do throw off that cap. I am sure your dress must make you feel ill.'

'I am so used to the cap - it has become a sort of shell,' said Dorothea, smiling. 'I feel rather bare and exposed when it is off.'

'I must see you without it; it makes us all warm,' said Celia, throwing down her fan, and going to Dorothea. It was a pretty picture to see this little lady in white muslin unfastening the widow's cap from her more majestic sister, and tossing it on to a chair. Just as the coils and braids of dark-brown hair had been set free, Sir James entered the room. He looked at the released head, and said, 'Ah!' in a tone of satisfaction.

'It was I who did it, James,' said Celia. 'Dodo need not make such a slavery of her mourning; she need not wear that cap any more among her friends.'

'My dear Celia,' said Lady Chettam, 'a widow must wear her mourning at least a year.'

'Not if she marries again before the end of it,' said Mrs Cadwallader, who had some pleasure in startling her good friend the Dowager. Sir James was annoyed, and leaned forward to play with Celia's Maltese dog.

'That is very rare, I hope,' said Lady Chettam, in a tone intended to guard against such events. 'No friend of ours ever committed herself in that way except Mrs Beevor, and it was very painful to Lord Grinsell when she did so. Her first husband was objectionable, which made it the greater wonder. And severely she was punished for it. They said Captain Beevor dragged her about by the hair, and held up loaded pistols at her.'

'Oh, if she took the wrong man!' said Mrs Cadwallader, who was in a decidedly wicked mood. 'Marriage is always bad then, first or second.

Priority is a poor recommendation in a husband if he has got no other. I would rather have a good second husband than an indifferent first.'

'My dear, your clever tongue runs away with you,' said Lady Chettam. 'I am sure you would be the last woman to marry again prematurely, if our dear Rector were taken away.'

'Oh, I make no vows; it might be a necessary economy. It is lawful to marry again, I suppose; else we might as well be Hindoos instead of Christians. Of course if a woman accepts the wrong man, she must take the consequences, and one who does it twice over deserves her fate. But if she can marry blood, beauty, and bravery - the sooner the better.'

'I think the subject of our conversation is very ill-chosen,' said Sir James, with a look of disgust. 'Suppose we change it.'

'Not on my account, Sir James,' said Dorothea, determined not to lose the opportunity of freeing herself from certain oblique references to excellent matches. 'If you are speaking on my behalf, I can assure you that no question can be more indifferent and impersonal to me than second marriage. It is no more to me than if you talked of women going fox-hunting: whether it is admirable in them or not, I shall not follow them. Pray let Mrs Cadwallader amuse herself on that subject as much as on any other.'

'My dear Mrs Casaubon,' said Lady Chettam, in her stateliest way, 'you do not, I hope, think there was any allusion to you in my mentioning Mrs Beevor. It was only an instance that occurred to me. She was step-daughter to Lord Grinsell: he married Mrs Teveroy for his second wife. There could be no possible allusion to you.'

'Oh no,' said Celia. 'Nobody chose the subject; it all came out of Dodo's cap. Mrs Cadwallader only said what was quite true. A woman could not be married in a widow's cap, James.'

'Hush, my dear!' said Mrs Cadwallader. 'I will not offend again. I will not even refer to Dido or Zenobia. Only what are we to talk about? I, for my part, object to the discussion of Human Nature, because that is the nature of rectors' wives.'

Later in the evening, after Mrs Cadwallader was gone, Celia said privately to Dorothea, 'Really, Dodo, taking your cap off made you like yourself again in more ways than one. You spoke up just as you used to do, when anything was said to displease you. But I could hardly make out whether it was James that you thought wrong, or Mrs Cadwallader.'

‘Neither,’ said Dorothea. ‘James spoke out of delicacy to me, but he was mistaken in supposing that I minded what Mrs Cadwallader said. I should only mind if there were a law obliging me to take any piece of blood and beauty that she or anybody else recommended.’

‘But you know, Dodo, if you ever did marry, it would be all the better to have blood and beauty,’ said Celia, reflecting that Mr Casaubon had not been richly endowed with those gifts, and that it would be well to caution Dorothea in time.

‘Don't be anxious, Kitty; I have quite other thoughts about my life. I shall never marry again,’ said Dorothea, touching her sister's chin, and looking at her with indulgent affection. Celia was nursing her baby, and Dorothea had come to say good-night to her.

‘Really - quite?’ said Celia. ‘Not anybody at all - if he were very wonderful indeed?’

Dorothea shook her head slowly. ‘Not anybody at all. I have delightful plans. I should like to take a great deal of land, and drain it, and make a little colony, where everybody should work, and all the work should be done well. I should know every one of the people and be their friend. I am going to have great consultations with Mr Garth: he can tell me almost everything I want to know.’

‘Then you *will* be happy, if you have a plan, Dodo?’ said Celia. ‘Perhaps little Arthur will like plans when he grows up, and then he can help you.’

Sir James was informed that same night that Dorothea was really quite set against marrying anybody at all, and was going to take to ‘all sorts of plans,’ just like what she used to have. Sir James made no remark. To his secret feeling there was something repulsive in a woman's second marriage, and no match would prevent him from feeling it a sort of desecration for Dorothea. He was aware that the world would regard such a sentiment as preposterous, especially in relation to a woman of one-and-twenty; the practice of ‘the world’ being to treat of a young widow's second marriage as certain and probably near, and to smile with meaning if the widow acts accordingly. But if Dorothea did choose to espouse her solitude, he felt that the resolution would well become her.